A COMMENT ON MALCOLM RICHARDSON
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Malcolm Richardson has had the good fortune to find what every historian is looking for: A bundle of documents buried deep inside an archive, hidden away for many years. Soon after a historian discovers such a treasure, however, frustration quickly overtakes excitement. The main question the historian now faces is how to shape the material into a cohesive historical narrative. Furthermore, the historian must resist the temptation necessarily to place this newfound material at the center of the larger story.

Richardson has presented a well-written, informative, empirically rich account of the Abraham Lincoln Stiftung's (ALS) brief history. His essay offers insight into a hitherto forgotten part of the activities of the Rockefeller Foundation and into a chapter of German-American cultural relations during the Weimar Republic. But his account, as is the case with any microscopic analysis of a single historical event, runs the danger of having its conclusions and judgments relativized when observed from a broader historical perspective. With this comment, I would like to offer a few suggestions on how to situate the history of the ALS within a broader contextual framework and, therefore, to decenter the main subject of Richardson's investigation. In the following, I first raise five possible leitmotifs for such a contextualization, then I explore two of them in greater detail.

A first leitmotif might be the history of the Rockefeller Foundation itself. In this, the ALS could be seen as a part of its overall activities not just in Germany, not just in the area of scholarship, and not just in the field of education. It could include the international dimension of the foundation and its institutional politics. It is, for example, quite
interesting to ask what role the European headquarters in Paris played in the decisions regarding the ALS, considering French-German hostility at the time. If one embeds the history of the ALS within the whole range of activities of the Rockefeller Foundation, its scope and impact would become reduced. Besides the ALS, the foundation sponsored many other activities for German scholars and scientific institutions, including the International Educational Board, founded by Rockefeller in 1923, which supported individuals, such as Albert Einstein, and institutions, such as the library of the University of Munich, the Institute of Physics at the University of Göttingen, the Kaiser-Wilhelm-Gesellschaft, and the Notgemeinschaft der deutschen Wissenschaft.

Another leitmotif might be the general history of philanthropy in the United States, referred to in Richardson's title but rarely discussed in his text. This includes the political, cultural, economic, and academic origins and purposes of American philanthropical organizations. The history of the Rockefeller Foundation and its programs might be compared to other foundations, such as the Carnegie Foundation or the Cecil Rhodes Foundation. One could show what political influence these institutions gained in different parts of society, what impact they had on American culture, and how they actually contributed to U.S. foreign cultural policy since the 1920s.

A third leitmotif might focus on the role of American foundations and endowments as agencies for promoting international understanding and peace. In general, it can be said that a primary goal of the Rockefeller Foundation, as well as other similar foundations, was to cultivate international cooperation based on harmony and peaceful coexistence. From this point of view, the ALS could be seen as a single tile within a larger mosaic that can be called the international peace movement.
The fourth leitmotif locates an analysis of the ALS within the context of the German-American intellectual relationship since the late nineteenth century. In placing the ALS within the broader realm of German-American intellectual cooperation, it becomes clear that something that sounded novel and exceptional in the 1920s was in fact not new. Two examples underscore this point: First, the notion that Germans were unfamiliar with private foundations is inaccurate; second, it is misleading to suggest that foreign sponsorship of such organizations had to be shrouded in secrecy. In 1905 the American Speyer Foundation and the German Koppel Stiftung sponsored an exchange of professors between Germany and the United States that was inaugurated by Harvard University and the University of Berlin. In addition, the Koppel Stiftung later became one of the sponsors of the Kaiser-Wilhelm-Gesellschaft of Physical Chemistry. The Germanistic Society, founded in New York in 1904, organized and sponsored lecture series for German scholars in the United States. The still famous German-American brewer Adolphus Busch from St. Louis and the businessman Hugo Reisinger from New York financed the creation of the Germanic Museum at Harvard in 1910. A year later, an exchange program between the University of Wisconsin and Germany was established with the backing of the Carl Schurz Memorial Association. In 1913 the German-American Jacob Schiff sponsored an exchange professorship at Cornell. The most important post-World War I example of a German foundation is the Stifterverband der deutschen Wissenschaft, founded in 1920. German industry also helped to establish societies in order to promote education and research. For instance, there were the Justus-Liebig-Gesellschaft zur Förderung des Unterrichts and the Emil-Fischer-Gesellschaft zur Förderung der chemischen Forschung, both founded in 1920 and sponsored by the chemical industry. In the same year the Helmholtz-Gesellschaft zur Förderung der physikalisch-technischen Forschung was established with the support of the electrotechnical industry.
It is worthwhile to investigate the close personal entanglements between cultural and economic institutions and the fact that the majority of sponsors were German or German-American Jews. It remains to be studied how this collaboration between the cultural and economic elites influenced German foreign policy. The Jewish background of these private foundations was one reason why officials did not want to make the sponsorship public. This was especially true in the case of the Amerika Institut, founded in 1910 with financing from Speyer and Schiff. Many of the ALS fellows and sponsors of German-American cultural projects after the war also were Jewish. In this light, it may not be so surprising to learn that many ALS fellows later opposed the Nazi regime.

Another similarity between pre- and post-World War I cooperation is the mixture of official and private initiatives. Although the ALS’s representatives tried to avoid any governmental participation, they soon found out that because of Germany’s centralized political and academic structures, success was impossible without some state support.

Looking at this broader picture, we can assert that academic cooperation and exchange in the early twentieth century was continuous, even if interrupted by the war and Germany’s international isolation afterward. The United States belonged to the few countries that tried very hard to reintegrate the Germans into international cooperation immediately after the end of the war. The Americans - and not only the Rockefeller Foundation - organized emergency aid programs and were eager to re-establish close relations with Germany. In 1922-3 the Carl Schurz professorship was revived, and in 1927 Harvard inaugurated the Kuno Francke Professorship of German Art and Culture through the generosity of such German-American Jews as Felix and Paul Warburg.
But in comparing cooperation in the decades before and after the war, we should not neglect substantive differences. In Germany after 1918, the Reich government no longer was the main initiator of this cooperation, and people chosen by the ALS as fellows did not belong to the academy’s inner circles. For example, whereas after 1890 mainstream teachers went to the United States with the Prussian-American Exchange of Teachers program, in the 1920s the ALS chose teachers and intellectuals with alternative concepts. Furthermore, the importance of German-Americans within American culture had declined. After World War I it was not the Germans who were trying to influence American culture and science through their foreign cultural policy but the Americans who now used their economic and intellectual potential to introduce their political values and educational ideas into German society.

From an international perspective, we also have to take into account the transformation of international science after 1918. This transformation spread beyond the relationship between Germany and America, but it deeply affected the mutual cooperation of both countries. Moreover, it is characterized by the rise of American science and the rise of the United States to the status of leading scientific power. This shift, which had already begun before the war, was the result of new economic and cultural developments in the international arena. Due to the war and the postwar crises, German science and research were internationally isolated and lacked a sufficient financial basis for research. In Germany the foundation funds were destroyed by inflation, and financial support from the government was rare. German science would never recover, and the exodus of most prominent German scientists after 1933 symbolized its final decline. Although this line of argument cannot be further pursued here, by 1945 the United States had taken the leading international position in scientific research. To summarize: I see the program of the ALS as a part of the ongoing history of German-
American cooperation, rather than as something new and different; however, this history has its share of major shifts and breaks. What was innovative about the ALS program was its direct political purpose: It aimed to create a cohort of educators and intellectuals in Germany who supported democracy and an open society. After a more-or-less successful transfer of aspects of German culture to North America through the end of the nineteenth century, the cultural transfer flowed in the opposite direction after World War I.

This leads me to my fifth and final leitmotif, which is the connection between education and public policy. Richardson emphasizes the important role that ideas about education had in the establishment of the ALS. The program aimed to support young, alternative intellectuals and teachers in order to give them a chance to proceed with their projects. The long-term goal was to reorient the German aristocratic and conservative system of secondary and higher education toward democratic and republican ideals. But was the idea to promote democracy, international understanding, and peace unique to the postwar period? And, perhaps more important, was it realistic?

In 1896 Nicholas Murray Butler, president of Columbia University and one of the foremost American educators who later became not only a key figure in the Carnegie Foundation but also one of the main representatives of the international peace movement, published an article titled "Democracy and Education." In it he linked democracy with the concept of education. In his view, the educational ideal in a democracy must be the development of an "intelligent citizenship," that is, the teaching of individual responsibility for social and political progress, on the one hand, and of democratic moral issues and values, on the other. Here, Butler addresses a topic that was one of the most widely discussed issues in international cultural relations in the first decades of the century. "Education" was the buzzword for international exhibitions, world's fairs, exchange programs, congresses, international
institutions, and so forth. The belief in the universal merits of international education also led to the foundation of many international institutions, a process that was in many ways carried out under American leadership. For example, the National Educational Association had proposed in 1884 and again in 1910 the foundation of an International Council of Education; the proposal was finally realized in 1923 when World Federation of Educational Associations was established. In 1912 the U.S. Congress passed a resolution for the creation of an International Board of Education. With Butler as director, the Division of Intercourse and Education of the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace discussed several plans for international educational cooperation, leading in 1919 to the establishment of the Institute of International Education. I already have mentioned the Rockefeller Foundation’s International Educational Board. All of these institutions served to promote international cooperation in all areas of education. They established exchange programs, organized conferences, and sponsored scholarships.

Within the broader scope of international cooperation in education, the ALS was no exception. Growing international exchange since the turn of the century had led to the steady increase in national discourses on alternatives in the educational systems in different countries. When we try to locate Germany in this process, we find a few more reasons for the failure of the ALS, namely, the differing structure of the educational systems in the two countries, the mutual misperceptions, and the possible alternatives for reform. Let me conclude with a few comments on these points.

Before World War I the German educational system became an international model. Germans academics and politicians were well aware of this fact. Nationalistic pride nevertheless led to ignorance or rejection of developments in educational facilities, research, and innovations abroad. Although Germans paid attention to the
transformation in the American educational system after the 1890s, their overall criticism, especially of the system of higher learning, prevented an open reception of American educational ideas and theories. As Peter Drewek has shown, the "official" view in Germany led to a selectively constructed "image" of the other country's system according to the parameters of its own logic, a misperception that continued after the war.

Conversely, the ALS's promoters neglected the structure and traditions of Germany's educational system, which could not be changed from the outside. In contrast, German education reformers such as Becker aimed to effect a structural reform of the universities from the inside. The idea of exporting the concept of democracy without considering particular needs of the importing country was destined to fail. Thus, the goal of the ALS was unrealistic from the beginning. The type of reform promoted by the ALS should have created a consciousness among scholars and students that was not based on militarism and chauvinism. But such ideas were not linked to democratic ideals as much as they were to nationalism. The Americans could not yet offer an alternative educational structure that could overcome Germany's tarnished image of American educational institutions. It was illusory to believe that the creation of a small idealistic elite could change either the German educational system or the German image of America.

These five leitmotifs suggest ways in which the history of the ALS could be placed within a broader historical context. Depending on the angle from which one approaches the subject, different narratives are created. But the precondition of synthesis is empirical research. Richardson's study presents an insightful account of an institution we knew nothing about. Institutions can be interpreted as parts of the social structure and as cognitive entities of society. Within and without institutions, social
actors develop the framework in which they can pursue their goals. At the same time, their actions are influenced and limited by the institutions they have created. I believe the history of the ALS offers an excellent example of this dialectical relationship.