

ASP50:introduction For ASP Sept 7 2011

Making Our African Studies Program.

(NDEA TITLE VI = C.YOUNG 1964)

FIRST MEETING

It was a blustery . cloudy. joyless day in October of 1962. Here we were .all three of us huddled together in a small pokey room in what was then an apartment building where Hilldale shopping centre stands now. There were three of us Fred Simoons, Aristide Zolberg, and me. Simoons (57-66) a geographer and an expert on Ethiopia, was by far the oldest . He was then beginning his fifth year in Madison , Zolberg (61-63) was a political scientist and a budding Africanist at the start of his second year, and I was an historian and anthropologist was then not quite two years in the USA. I was in the chair only because my colleague Phil Curtin was on leave. The occasion was the first meeting of the the new African Studies Program and that was also its complete agenda . For the most part Simoons and Zolberg were curious to hear what this new program actually was going to be about and pelted me with questions , most of which were could still not be answered. So we merely agreed to meet again when there would be some business to transact or something concrete to report . That is the lackluster image I recall of the debut of that new program at what was then the whole University of Wisconsin. It certainly was unassuming and yet that meeting was already the culmination of a complex process that had culminated late in 1961 when the Regents approved the creation of an Africa Studies Program.

To put that whole process in a nutshell we might well say: Yea We are 50! We've made it. Baby\ Lets celebrate! Release the balloons ! Let the drums ring ! break into dance and song !

Alas, that is not the academic way of doing things. That way is an academic year long procession of serious lectures about the contents of that nutshell. And so this is merely the first one in a whole parade of them.

BACKGROUND :

After WW II and again after the end of the Korean war (1953) UW Madison truly began to blossom . In part this was an effect of the GI bill which brought large numbers of older new students especially graduates. In part Prof.Crawford Young tells me that had to do with changes in the way the university was financed by the state. In any case the campus grew, the faculty grew too, and the whole personality of the university began to change . Yes it was still a typical land grant college and the local reputation of its college of agriculture was what still mattered most elsewhere in Wisconsin, but by now the university was far more than that . In particular it was now more involved with the outside world than it had ever before and that outside world was now also very new. Decolonisation was on the march: South Asia 1947, Indonesia 1949 , (Mao' China 1949) Bandung 1950 and Africa was bound to follow: first North Africa (from Libya 1951 to Morocco and Tunisia 1956). Tropical Africa could not be far behind. In Madison the historian of US diplomacy and a specialist of India, Fred Harvey Harrington, was so well aware of this trend that he soon began to strive for far reaching changes at the university in order to remain relevant and meet the challenges of a post colonial world . To do this he espoused what had been a new model when it had been first proposed in 1947(Indian Independence) namely programs that would cross-cut departments ,-- what we now call area study programs . Yet until then Academia had completely ignored that path . Still when Harrington dusted it off his model he found enthusiastic support among some of his colleagues especially historian Bertram Hill (ex OSS pre CIA- inWW2) and economist Edwin Young (specialist of Indonesia).

. Meanwhile the decolonisation of tropical Africa was following that of North Africa . Ghana became independent in 1957 . In that years also came the Beep-beep-beep of Sputnik's wake-up call for the USA, a call that also heralded direct federal grants for its universities. Still the same year Melville Herskovits , William Brown . Gray Cowan, and a few other scholars founded the ASA in this country. Their goal was to advise political Washington and lobby the then three major interested foundations in New York (Carnegie/Ford/Rockefeller) . While doing this, however, the organizers of the ASA as well as the New York Foundations sidelined the historically black colleges such as Howard where Africa (mostly history) had long been taught by well known

Afro-American scholars. Melville Herskovits was a familiar figure in Congress where he was often called to testify to committees on foreign relations about Africa. Already some time before this, in 1951, he had set up his own ASP at Northwestern with financial backing by the Carnegie Foundation, as a sort of permanent seminar that for many years was to remain centered around himself and anthropology. Two years later (1953) the sociologist William O. Brown also formerly of the OSS followed that example at Boston U with backing by the Ford Foundation. That center first flourished mostly around the anthropologist Daniel McCall. Two years in 1959 later James Smoot Coleman, a political scientist, founded the third early ASP at UCLA. It included a larger group of Africanists than the two others and focused this time around political science.

1959 was also a true vintage year. Nationally a great wave of youthful optimism carried John Kennedy to the White House. Back at the farm in Madison the innovators had the initiative: in that year Harrington became Vice President and Edwin Young dean of LxS. Both were to become presidents of the UW later on and lead the university well into the 1970's. And in the Fall of that year Harrington called a humble recent recruit in the history department who was teaching Latin American history to his office in order to discuss with him how the curriculum in history could be enlarged so as to include most of the world. That young recruit was Philip D. Curtin, the founder of our ASP.

FOUNDING THE PROGRAM

Philip Curtin was an expert in the history of the British Empire who arrived here in 1956 from Swarthmore College. He arrived with his thesis published as a book about Jamaica and he had with research underway about the Image of Africa, especially of West Africa in Great Britain during the past century or so. He had begun that study in 1955 by traveling throughout West Africa where he witnessed various struggles for independence at first hand. He arrived in Madison, recruited by Henry Hill, to fill two open positions at once: the British Empire and Latin America History. He also arrived with his own new course: The "Expansion of Europe" later known as "The World and the West" plus his own dream of creating a comparative history program for the tropical parts of the world. Meanwhile he still continued his involvement with Africa and with the apparently brand new academic field of African History (apparently

because African American work was ignored). The next year (1957) when Ghana became independent Curtin convinced a certain John Fage, one of the founders of the academic African History in Britain, who was teaching there at the time to give a set of lectures at Madison (Knaplund/British Empire) about the earlier history of the Gold Coast. The lectures appeared in UWPRESS in 1959 as *Ghana a historical interpretation* and were the first of many books on Africa to follow. Later in 1957 Curtin and Mc Call (Boston) also attended a major conference about African history in London .

Two years later, that is in 1959 again he undertook a second almost academic year long trip, by road across the nearly the whole of tropical Africa to enquire about the conditions of its archives. This came just after Guinea's Independence (1958) and on the eve of a year that saw no less than 18 other states follow suit (1960). Of course this was a very informative trip during which, apart from everything else, he also struck a great many acquaintances with academic folks such as Neil Skinner and myself. So we suddenly better understand why such an august personage as vice president Harrington wanted to consult this lowly assistant professor after his return to the fold. Lowly perhaps, but also up to date as to Africa and one who shared Harrington's views about expanding the gaze of the University

Then July 1960 rolled around and the Congo blew up. When Phil mistakenly heard that I was available, he got in short order: Harrington's OK, funding from the Rockefeller Foundation, and the nod from the departments of History. Then sometime in late September he phoned me in Belgium and gave me just two or three minutes to decide whether to come or not. I agreed for a term of three years but held out for a part appointment in Anthropology as well as in History. A special immigration visa was quickly procured, we arrived in New York on Thanksgiving day 1960, and a day later we were here. The day after that already Phil and I began to discuss his views about a Comparative Tropical History Program of which Africa would be a part, and also to talk about an ASP across departments as well. Ten days later I already accompanied him on a one day fundraising trip to the Carnegie Foundation at New York.

The discussions between us about the essential features of the ASP continued all along the Spring semester of 1961. Phil Curtin started from his experience of the academic world in the US and his knowledge of the UW in particular. I started from

seven years experience of multidisciplinary research at the Institute where I had worked in Central Africa (mainly social and natural sciences plus tropical medicine and nutrition) and three years of directing its centre for social studies (i.e.a demographer, two urban sociologists , an economist , several social anthropologists , a physical anthropologist /archaeologist , two linguists and myself as historian/anthro) . Together we worked out what we wanted and why. Meanwhile , Curtin, Hill (now dean of international relations) , Ed Young, and Harrington laid the administrative and financial foundations for area programs in general including the Africa one. They succeeded later in 1961 and the ASP was officially born even though Phil and I were still busy transforming this from paper into hard reality well into Spring 1962. Then Phil went on leave and we had that program's first meeting-- with which this talk began.

THE FIRST YEARS

It took some time for Curtin and myself to set up the basic outline of the program, because we had to make several fundamental and irreversable decisions of the type either/or , and because we wanted to build a solid program that would last .What issues were these and how were they resolved ?

First we had to decide whether this would be a degree granting department like UCLA, a program mainly based in one leading department as had been/was the case at Northwestern , or truly a cross-department program . A new ASP department had the advantage that we would only have to negotiate with a single dean and president not with a set of departments and their faculty. But we, like most other programs were against it. First Curtin argued that a special department would create a ghetto and would prevent the general spreading of awareness about Africa's place in the world across the university . Secondly we wanted to guarantee that the usual standards of scholarship at the university would be maintained in African Studies and a basic training within a discipline rather than just across disciplines seemed the best guarantee of that . That was also more in line with the existing job market for graduates at that point. Finally we feared that a small separate department might be easier to set up but just as easy to abolish in the future. The administrative authorities agreed on all these points.

Next question. Which specialties should the program encompass ? Phil addressed this issue with the knowledge of what other ASP programs were doing and experience of what the NY foundations would consider and I used my experience of a large multidisciplinary institute. These sorts of considerations explain for instance why we ruled out psychology right from the start. As to what belonged : To begin with our ASP was already different from others at the outset because historians were founding it. Next it was easy to see that at the very least political science , anthropology, and geography needed to be involved as well as history. In any case we were soon rebuffed by sociologists and economists (despite Ed Young!) who claimed --at least then -- that they were general sciences driven by theoretical models and had no truck with particularistic enterprises. Curtin also involved the school of journalism very early on. And because a thenewpost of dean of International Studies had now appeared , --Bertram Hill with a new hat--, we could also think about involving disciplines beyond the college of L xS.. Now that was really wholly novel administrative terrain and therefore progress was slower. Nevertheless the appointment in 1964 of Marvin Miracle in agricultural economics in the then college of agriculture. was a milestone because it broke through the barrier between schools and set a precedent that was followed later on by several other entities such as the school of education and the law school .

At that point and still in Spring 1961 Curtin and I were left with one big issue. Both of us felt that whatever the specialty of all students in the program, all of them needed to be attuned to the cultures and know the languages of the places where they planned to do research. We were quite conscious that when it came to Europe historians especially but also other researchers had to master the languages of the country they were studying . So the serious Africanist had to do the same. I felt that we needed linguists to teach some of the major languages and that language learning was the best gateway to learning about culture. Phil was convinced that literature was equally important. We therefore needed to teach a few widespread African languages preferably with some written literature as well as African literature in European Languages. But none of the UW departments , not even linguistics , saw any place for such a program in their bailiwicks.

So we proposed the creation of a new department of African languages and Literature. even though none of the other ASP programs had such a feature, no doubt because of its cost. At first the administrators balked at it because it involved considerable expense, but also because it expected very low enrollments, but we managed to convince them that languages and literature were essential. Eventually Phil designed the whole department from scratch by cobbling together rules and a full curriculum of instruction, from the practice of existing language departments. His proposal was approved on February 7 1964, and it still remains the only department of its kind in the USA, and a major asset to the program as is evident for instance in the fact that the national Institute for African languages is housed here.

Compared to the crucial issues of creating positions in core departments as well as the department of African languages and literature, other questions were not as urgent because they could be approached piece-meal. Even finding funding for student support was not as crucial. Graduate student support started at first with some grants or parts of renewable grants from the Carnegie and Ford Foundations. In any case there were very few students to begin with during those first years of this brandnew program. Later the foundations renewed such grants until the Federal Title VI (Fulbright programs) could kick in and provide us with a more stable basis in that regard at least until now.

In this fashion then an ASP program arose on paper. But... how did we build such a program in the real world? Gathering information was the first step and head hunting the second. With his contacts across the USA Curtin excelled at both, whilst I learned how to go about it. First came a foundation grant, then one identified a person who seemed excellent to fit a wanted position, then one contacted the person and tried to recruit him (all him at first). Or in some instances the person came first and the grant followed. Phil could be brazen as when he tried to lure people such as the linguist Joe Greenberg, then still at Colombia I believe, or Roland Oliver the leader at SOAS our main competitor in history at the time! I joined in from the start even though I was just a beginning assistant professor. I still can hear myself boasting about Madison and all its marvelous perspectives to a somber AC Jordan in an equally somber room at UCLA. He had first appeared on Curtin's radar a little earlier and I was following up a first

tentative contact. It must have helped , for a little later he accepted our offer and in 1963 he became our first professor in the not yet existing ALL-- albeit one totally baffled by a universe of unintelligible rules governing student credits in depth and in width, in house , --outhouse , what have you. Sometimes the going was harder . On another occasion there I was struggling downtown through an icy snowsquall in January along side Wulf Whiteley, a well known linguist on Swahili from SOAS - trying to convince him that Madison was a very nice place to be and represented a better opportunity for him than Dar es Salaam. -- It did not work .

Once a person had been recruited in principle and there was funding one or both of us went to the target department with the offer of a new appointment fully paid for the next three years an appointment to be specialized in Africa, but obviously also one of a person available to teach other more general courses. I cannot remember that any such offer was ever refused. The success rate in retaining such recruits was also rather high. Indeed , seen in retrospect, it is astonishing that so many Africanist faculty stayed with us for decades or for their whole careers and our program certainly owes a good deal of its seamless integration in the university to them. Still in some cases the new recruit did not fit in well with his department and a replacement had to be sought. This worried us because we had not always have funds available to entice the department to do that . Still we were lucky that such efforts succeeded for essential slots , as shown by the cases of Crawford Young in political science and Idris Makward in written literature .

Another occupation that kept us busy was outreach. On paper outreach was a low priority but it was still crucial from the start, if only to gain acceptance for our program on campus and in the state by spreading knowledge about Africa. , Therefore we visited venues right and left, whenever possible, be it on campus , in town (usually at one or another church) , or elsewhere in the state to lecture about Africa. I will always remember the mistake I made when I gave a talk at about recent South African History to a ladies Club in Milwaukee and proceeded to inflict a solid two hour long lecture on a bevvy of unsuspecting older matrons! What amateurs will do !!! --Eventually outreach would be put on a firm administrative footing in 1973.

EPILOGUE: COMING OF AGE: 1965 -1972

And so within just a handful of years the program had acquired a basic structure and began to function properly. One proof of this was that by 1964 the cost of the earliest faculty members hired, me included, was absorbed into the regular budget. Another indication was the creation of a basic administrative infrastructure. Yes there had been program chairs ever since the foundation of the program but before the Fall of 1964 Phil or I were always chair, depending on who was on leave, and meetings tended to be *ad hoc* and informal. But in that year Crawford Young took over and meetings became more regular. By 1964 it was also painfully evident that neither Phil nor I as chairs could keep up with the regular administrative paper work. As a result came the creation of a permanent position of assistant to the director, a position filled by Marjorie Harris. Who knows where we would be today without their legendary commitment to the program? So let us halt our relentless academic exposition for a moment to salute **Catherine Reiland, Eileen McNamara, and Marjorie Harries**. Four years later in 1968 further growth made the creation of an associate directorship ineluctable. With this additional appointment African Studies acquired its permanent administrative skeleton and became a fully integrated unit of the university. Again we have been fortunate in the program's choices for these people too have been quite extraordinarily dedicated to the program. So let us forget academic gravitas again for a moment to salute these directors who have kept the program afloat, to wit.: **Jim Delehanty, Betty Wass, Paul Beckett, and David Wiley**.

Yet despite all of this by 1964 the future of the ASP was still not quite safe yet: the program's growth was still somewhat hesitant because one of its components was still rather weak. That component was its student body. Being brand new, the program still had relatively few students overall, even though courses about Africa did attract at least a sufficient number of them -- mainly I suspect because Africa was so often in the news at that time. Still at that juncture it was absolutely crucial for the program to attract sufficient numbers of graduate students and train them. The story of when and how that happened is the main development during the next period in the history of our program namely from 1965 to 1973 and Crawford Young will tell you all about it.

Still we are fifty: so let us end with two appropriate questions : First why did the program survive for half a century? After all that survival is not self evident. The reasons in my view are the following in order of importance :.a) because our program was and is part of a whole set of area programs ; (b) because of the long-term participation of a majority of its faculty both in the program as well as in the general affairs of their departments and schools ; (c) because over time and in some cases as the result of heroic efforts the program did manage to develop undergraduate enrollments on top of its graduate enrollment to justify its budget; (d) because of its considerable national and international reputation, a situation that was highly appreciated by the authorities in charge of UW Madison and presumably still is; (e) because we had direct access to the University presidents or campus chancellors when we needed it at least until the Shalala reorganisation . Yet when all is said and done the ASP survived to celebrate its golden jubilee because of the sheer dedication of so many for so long to Africa and its people.

Further Reading :

Anon [Harold Scheub], *The Department of African Languages and Literature: 40.*

Madison April 14 2004

Paul Beckett, *25th Anniversary 1961-1986 ASP at UW.* Madison October 29 1986

Philip D. Curtin, *On the Fringes of History: A Memoir ; 2005 ; travel journal 1959*
ed. Anne Curtin –expected.

William G. Martin, ”The Rise of African Studies and the Transnational Study of Africa “ *African Studies Review* ,54/1 :59-83 2011

Jan Vansina, *Living with Africa* 1994.

Vansina Jan