

C

O

P

Y

1953  
EXCERPT FROM LETTER OF SEPTEMBER 22/FROM M. M. KNIGHT TO  
JOSEPH H. WILLITS

JAN 22 1954

2005  
Harvard Univ  
Entrepreneurial  
history

Original  
Filed.  
200  
of Col.  
Knight

Another matter has to do with a letter-- not a happily worded one-- from Professor Cole, explaining to Clark Kerr that he would be glad to explain a new and revolutionary kind of economic history with a view to introducing it into the back country. Nobody but Gordon here seems to have much use for the Harvard brand of "entrepreneurial history." The second item in the letter was that the distinguished E. A. J. Johnson would be available to lead us up from darkness. I'm retiring at the end of this year, and do not interfere with appointments, but there is no chance on earth of getting E. A. J. Johnson into the Economics Department at Berkeley, with the tenure and at the salary which he would undoubtedly demand. This bizarre communication was turned over to me for comment, and of course I wrote my comments to Taylor (Paul S.) as Chairman of the Department. I told him some of the history of two pretty large outlays for economic history which I thought had yielded rather meagre results on the whole, and some results worse than none. You probably have heard the views of some members of Cole's "committee" about his entrepreneurial history-- anyway I have. Some of the remarks about a 1942 program, which was actually that of one man, were angry and disgusted. Carefully read, the article in the JEH, with footnote, didn't actually state that it was a committee's program-- Hamilton pointed this out after I had read the contrary, and I'm not a particularly careless reader. The man, Riemersma, who is coming here in economic history next year, gave several hard looks at this particular organized brand of business history and decided (wisely I think) to spend this year in Europe. I have at my elbow the Julien Hayem series of business histories, dating from 1911, and I can't to the life of me see any net improvement by the Soldiers' Field nucleus. Many people have asked me the riddle of why the Journal of Economic History has been so inferior, on the whole, to the old Journal of Economic and Business History. Berkeley has always been too remote or something to participate much in these red hot innovations. Gay had it in for us-- me particularly-- but I don't think Cole's attitude rises from the patronizing to the contemptuous. Flügel was actually snubbed by Gay. I never bothered Gay, Allyn Young having told me exactly what the score was. The reason I write this is that Paul Taylor is likely to assume that I sent you a copy of the letter on the Cole proposals. I may have said I was going to-- but my intention vanished as I got to thinking over the whole problem. Paul is always keen for more research, which often means more money, and said that of course we should like some for economic history. I thought, and he agreed, that he should go to you directly about any willingness on the Foundation's part and any receptiveness on Berkeley's concerning this subject. We need to be a trifle cautious about launching ventures which the University must finance sooner or later if they continue. The Bureau of Business and Economic Research has had more than intimations of the sort. Particularly in this case, there seems to be no reason for going through Harvard. Cole had some loosely-connected allusions to the importance and the connection with the new economic history, of "underdeveloped" countries. "Backward," "colonial," "dependent" countries with a new gobbledigook! I rather think this was sales talk for Johnson, who has been around government agencies for a decade. On that issue, all my friends agree with me-- the last place in the world to go for anything

original about a country is the American Embassy, Legation or Consulate, the information and opinions of which have been sifted beyond belief. I wasn't as sweeping as Sauer or Kroeber on the point till 1950-51, but my experience with American officialdom in the four countries of North Africa was completely convincing. Anyway, you'll know what it's about if Paul Taylor brings up the subject. I have now written you, though not sending the letter which I probably said I would. Abe Lincoln, I believe, is credited with the remark about bad promises.