

JUN 25 1941

CABLE ADDRESS: ACOLS

## AMERICAN COUNCIL OF LEARNED SOCIETIES

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MODERN LANGUAGE ASSOCIATION OF AMERICA, 1883  
AMERICAN HISTORICAL ASSOCIATION, 1884

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MAY 28 '41

MAY 27, 1941

SEP-8 '41

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Dear Dr. Stevens,

I propose to think aloud on paper and to reply to several of your letters at the same time, as a background for a conversation when you come down to the capital next week.

In spite of our modest efforts over the past decade or so, the emergency finds the United States very badly prepared at the intellectual level for a conflict with world implications. Had it not been for the efforts of you and me and some others we should have been infinitely worse prepared than we are, but that cannot disguise the fact that we are on the spot. The problem looks most acute with respect to Japanese, but inasmuch as its obviousness has already led to some efforts to solve it, it may turn out not to be quite so troublesome here as elsewhere. For here we are just on the verge of getting ourselves involved in places like Dakar, the Netherlands Indies, and Arabic regions with practically no trained personnel to carry on our intelligence and communications services in those regions. ✓

While we can hardly be said to have taken the lead in finding a solution, we have given the ball a kick whenever it rolled near to our foot. We were in the earliest discussions which led to the establishment of the Roster of Scientific and Specialized Personnel. We then fought in the Roster for the inclusion of a non-Western language category, ✓ and we played a considerable part in getting the category set up, although we finally had to admit its inclusion with Western languages. We participated fully in the Conference called by the Commissioner of Civil Service Flemming on April 12 (a Conference which your colleague John Marshall had more to do with calling than anyone else) at which we got the first exchange of ideas between government agencies and some advertising for the Roster but, so far as I can see, little action.

Meanwhile, some agencies of the government have gone ahead on their own, - the Marines, for instance, have set up (or are in process of setting up) a Japanese language school in Hawaii after fruitless dickerings with Harvard; the

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Navy has quite elaborate plans and is ready to put them into effect. There is something to be said for these agencies which can do something going ahead and getting it done without waiting for coordination. The FCC has given examinations in numerous languages, including Japanese, this last without much success. ✓

Several months ago I wrote the enclosed memorandum in its first draft. The Oriental Society appointed a Committee on the subject of the memorandum (Edgerton, chairman; Ware; and Speiser). This Committee is behaving much better than the outsider would suspect and is thoroughly sold on the idea of modern oriental languages, though its own background is not quite that. This draft has been before the Science Committee of the Advisory Board of the National Resources Planning Board. Here it was cheered quite enthusiastically, but that's all.

Meanwhile we've been trying to get something done at George Washington University. Last week we had a meeting one night and have planned and I think sold to the University the idea of a course in Japanese this Summer at the University to be given by Acker of the Freer Gallery. If this is successful (and climate and several other factors are against it) it may be the acorn which could be grown into a School of Oriental Studies of George Washington University which would have the advantage of being in Washington even if it were not a National School. 1

Perhaps you begin to see where your recent communications come in. Borton's Conference on Japanese Language Teaching at the Cornell Institute is obviously part of the development. One of the troubles is that the government agencies talk in terms of "learning Japanese" without saying what kind of Japanese. It is obviously impossible to learn all kinds of Japanese in a restricted time; people must learn to limit the end. One can learn to read a Japanese newspaper, or one can learn to speak colloquial Japanese, or one can learn to listen to the radio in Japanese, in a limited time, but one cannot learn all of them in a limited time, and the difficulty is that most implementation does not take cognizance of this fact. The Conference has to work its way through this problem and implement its solution. It has also to find some way of providing teachers.

Heine-Geldern fits in in a modest way. Unquestionably we have to have rapid development of American study in the area

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which interests him, Southeastern Asia. Unfortunately his own competences and interests are not quite those of emergency value. But he might be set to work making a survey of American facilities for the study of this region. We simply do not know such a simple fact as where there are any considerable collections of, let us say, dictionaries of Malay. We probably do have a great deal more than we are able to put our fingers on immediately, but we ought to be in a better position to put our fingers on facilities quickly. Heine-G and his colleagues at the American Museum have, I believe, already compiled some of this information. A survey would include, of course, a list of personnel. Heine-Geldern is competent in his field, has excellent general bibliographical knowledge, is, I think, completely intellectually honest, and already has his fingers in the stuff. A survey of American facilities for the study of Southeastern Asia is a defense measure. ✓

Gilbert Boris, about whom you wrote a few days ago, would also fit into the picture if there were any picture. We haven't anybody with just his training, - some of our archaeologists speak a little colloquial Arabic but, as you know, most of our Arabists contend that the Arabs don't speak Arabic, hence they are not interested. Nobody studies modern Arabic dialects for their own sake. We ought to have Boris here with about twenty pupils so that we might be ready to cooperate in the belt of lands in which Arabic is the lingua franca.

Wigmore of Northwestern has been corresponding with a Frenchman in Siam who seems to have the same competences in Siamese and Indo-Chinese, together with long experience as a judge on native courts in Southeastern Asia. He could be immensely useful if we had him here under proper auspices.

The whole thing needs coordinating. This would be a full-time job, but it would be one of the most useful defense jobs to be done. I cannot do it in spare time, nobody could, - and I have a full-time job even if I never look at an Oriental thing. Further, it isn't a job to be done by committees; somebody has to stick his neck out, make decisions, and get things done, even if they turn out later not to be just the right things. I don't know the answer, but I think that people like yourself in key posts, ought to know the problem.

Very sincerely yours,

*M. G.*  
 MORTIMER GRAVES