

2010

H-Diplo

H-Diplo Article Reviews

<http://www.h-net.org/~diplo/reviews/>

No. 252

Published on 4 January 2010

H-Diplo *Diplomatic History* Article Review Editors:

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Web and Production Editor: George Fujii

Commissioned for H-Diplo by Thomas Maddux

Paul A. Kramer. "Is the World Our Campus? International Students and U.S. Global Power in the Long Twentieth Century." *Diplomatic History* 33:5 (November 2009): 775-806. DOI: 10.1111/j.1467-7709.2009.00829.x. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-7709.2009.00829.x>.

URL: <http://www.h-net.org/~diplo/reviews/PDF/AR252.pdf>

Review by **Kristin Hoganson**, University of Illinois, Urbana-Champaign

Education beyond the Nation

I read Paul Kramer's Bernath Lecture with great interest, in part because its topic – education – is of great personal relevance to those of us who spend much of our time in the classroom. Building on the movement to broaden U.S. foreign relations history so that it encompasses all kinds of relations with the foreign, not just official relations between states, Kramer draws our attention to "international" students as foreign relations actors. By implication, our classrooms, our campuses, and our college towns all function as international relations nodes. Those of us who teach are more than interpreters of the United States in world context – we are participants.

But what kind of participants are we? That is, are we cultural internationalists who facilitate mutually enriching forms of exchange?¹ Or should we see our work with international students primarily in terms of competing national interests? In his effort to draw attention to the intersections between "student exchange' and geopolitics" (776), Kramer leans toward the latter interpretation. As Kramer shows, there is much to be gained from approaching the topic through the lens of U.S. global power. His review of the history of international students in the United States emphasizes the tendency of American educators and officials to view study-in-the-U.S. programs as a means of enhancing the nation's position in the world, starting with programs intended to foster colonial attachment and continuing with the Fulbright program and numerically more

¹ For an interpretation of study-abroad programs that emphasizes cultural internationalism, see Akira Iriye, *Cultural Internationalism and World Order* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1997): 101-03.

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significant (in terms of students) military training courses that also have aimed to advance U.S. interests and influence (781, 795, 797).

Though conceived as a means to advance U.S. power, educational programs often had unanticipated outcomes. Kramer draws attention to various “failures of educational power” – including, most dramatically, what he calls the Yamamoto problem (the possibility that former students would use their military training against the United States), the Nkrumah problem (the possibility that former students would develop into radical, anticolonial nationalists, especially after confronting racist Americans), and the Qtub problem (the possibility that foreign students would come to regard the United States as a loathsome enemy nation) (782). By 2001, additional problems had surfaced, which we might call the Quian Xuesen problem (the possibility that former students would rival or out-compete U.S. graduates in scientific and other fields with commercial applications) and the Disappearing Student problem (the possibility that the foreign student stream would dry up – and with it, the U.S. technological talent pool – a development that prompts questions as to whether international education programs should be seen primarily as a manifestation of U.S. power or a source of that power).

As these examples suggest, Kramer makes a convincing case for the value to be gained from bringing education-oriented scholarship into dialogue with foreign relations historians’ interest in international power relations. This is not a completely new enterprise, as seen for example in scholarship on the Cold War politics of area studies programs and the role of universities in defense and development initiatives.² Kramer, however, shifts attention from U.S. teachers and researchers to foreign-born students. And in contrast to those who have focused on overseas classrooms, Kramer persuasively argues that foreign relations history has unfolded in U.S. classrooms as well – a point that adds to larger arguments about the foreign relations significance of seemingly domestic affairs.³ I hope I’m not the only one who recommends this essay to students in search of research topics, for I’d like to see what further scholarship on this topic turns up.

² “Vicente L. Rafael, “The Cultures of Area Studies in the United States,” *Social Text* 41 (winter 1994): 91-111; Franklin Ng, “Knowledge for Empire: Academics and Universities in the Service of Imperialism,” *On Cultural Ground: Essays in International History* (Robert David Johnson, ed., Chicago: Imprint Publications, 1994): 123 – 146; Bruce Cumings, “Boundary Displacement: Area Studies and International Studies During and After the Cold War,” *Universities and Empire: Money and Politics in the Social Sciences During the Cold War*, Christopher Simpson, ed. (New York: The New Press, 1998): 159 – 88; Lawrence Soley, “The New Corporate Yen for Scholarship,” *Universities and Empire: Money and Politics in the Social Sciences during the Cold War*, Christopher Simpson, ed. (New York: The New Press, 1998): 229 – 49; Vicennte L. Rafael, “Regionalism, Area Studies, and the Accidents of Agency: *AHR Forum*,” *American Historical Review* 104 (Oct. 1999): 1208-1220; Michael E. Latham, *Modernization as Ideology: American Social Science and ‘Nation Building’ in the Kennedy Era* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2000).

³ In this respect, his insights are related to the literature on nineteenth-century efforts to assimilate Native Americans via education, Frederick E. Hoxie, *A Final Promise: The Campaign to Assimilate the Indians, 1880-1920* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1984); Rebecca McNulty Schreiber, “Education for Empire: Manual Labor, Civilization and the Family in Nineteenth-Century American Missionary Education,” Ph.D. Thesis, University of Illinois, Urbana-Champaign, 2007.

Above all, this essay left me wanting to know more about U.S.-educated students after they returned home. What were the long-term implications of their time in the United States? For example, how did their experiences shape their approaches to educational provisioning, economic development, and governance? Conversely, how did the presence of international students – and in some cases, their families – affect U.S. communities? Kramer is reluctant to embrace the term “student exchange,” for he finds that the term “telegraphs a sense of equality, mutuality and gift-giving” (779). But does an exchange have to be equal to merit attention? Early in his essay, Kramer dismisses the possibility that international students had much of an impact on the United States. “At most,” he writes, “Americans were to gain from these encounters a less ‘provincial’ approach to the world” (779). A decrease in provincialism strikes me as a rather important “at most.” Isn’t such a possibility well worth investigating too? And what about the students who have stayed in the United States? How do they fit into discussions of national power? Among the questions they bring to mind is whether programs justified in terms of international development instead contributed to a “brain drain” from poorer to wealthier countries.

If Kramer’s compelling case for the historical significance of international students makes me think I’d better get back to course prep, it also makes me wonder how the international students I have known would fit into a geopolitical schema. Although Kramer’s framework can certainly help me understand how they have come to be in my classrooms and some of the international relations implications of their time in the United States, a nation-centered approach (featuring the comparative interests of sending and host nations) misses some of the complexity of their stories. What do we make of a foreign student who takes classes from non-U.S. nationals, socializes with students from several other countries, and goes on to pursue a scientific career, involving a post-doc in another country, significant transnational collaboration, and eventual mentorship of other international students? In other words, does framing educational programs in terms of national interests deflect our attention from some of the ways that colleges, universities, and academic fields have their own cultures and interests, which cannot always be conflated with those of particular nations?

Kramer’s emphasis on national power makes me wonder what other factors besides nationality have shaped students’ experiences. Kramer rightfully draws attention to race, but should we regard class backgrounds and individual economic aspirations as just as salient? What about religion? (Notre Dame’s history of attracting Mexican students who wanted a good *Catholic* education comes to mind). Given that perhaps three-quarters of the foreign students studying in the United States prior to World War II were men (791), is it possible that women students saw their experiences in terms of gendered struggles for opportunity as well as national struggles? How have generational experiences affected

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students' identities and affiliations? (I'm reminded of an empathetic article I once saw in a campus paper titled "Bars Intolerant of Foreign IDs.")⁴

In sum, should we regard education only in terms of national interests or also in terms of potentially transnational group interests? Do we miss something if we focus on U.S. global power rather than the creation of a global elite? What if we frame the issue of international education in terms of world history, class formation, capitalism, democracy, or globalization instead of in terms of U.S. foreign relations history -- what would we learn about power then? I eagerly await the answers to these questions.

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⁴ Lane Song, "Bars Intolerant of Foreign IDs," *Daily Illini*, April 24, 2006.