

INTERVIEW with HENRY CORD MEYER

April 18, 1974

McCULLOCH: The first question, Henry, I ask everybody, and I now ask you. What attracted you about coming to Irvine?

MEYER: Oh, I think this was a sense of a wonderful opportunity to join a distinguished university system and to get in on the ground floor with a beginning, emerging campus and to develop within that campus some brand-new directions in the study and the teaching of history. That was the primary reason why I was interested in coming. And the second reason, I suppose, was that, like others in our profession, the idea of the move hit me at a point which was what you could call the academic menopause, and this seemed to be, I think, a contributing factor in facilitating the idea of a move, but I would consider it distinctly secondary to the first.

McCULLOCH: That's very interesting. Now, what are your memories of the conferences we held? You came into the picture in the early fall of '64, and you came down, I remember, quite regularly in your little bus. Were you in on any of the conferences?

MEYER: Yes. I remember being in on only one of those major conferences in that central conference room there in that first building, whatever it is called, where the movable partition had been drawn apart, and there was a large set of tables around which 25 or 30 people were assembled, from the Chancellor and the Vice Chancellor on down through all the other people who were around. I remember the day that I was there, there was a good deal of talk back and forth about the 6-3-3 requirement as related to the idea of a liberal arts education or a liberal education, and I was struck by the fact that there was fairly strong support, as I recall it, from most of the people in the sciences, all of the people in the humanities, but not very

much from March or Feldman, and I don't know who else would have been there from the social sciences at that point. This is the one enduring memory that I have of that one meeting that I attended, because the whole meeting revolved around that and revolved around the question, among other things, should one have physics courses for nonphysics majors or history courses for nonhumanities majors? And I think there was pretty general agreement with the exception of this social science ^{disc.} ~~matter~~. There was pretty general agreement that one should teach the course within the context of one's academic discipline and not make any concessions to popularization or simplification of the material.

McCULLOCH: Now, when making your appointments in history, Henry, you and I worked very closely together with enormous diligence and hard work, did you find the Universitywide administrative regulations reasonable, helpful, or obstructive?

MEYER: I would say that my relationship to the University regulations arising out of my lack of experience in recruiting at that time was one of complete acceptance, and by and large I still have the sense of complete acceptance of the philosophical rationale for these ways of doing things and a willingness to have confidence that, in most cases, the procedures have worked out really rather well. You and I both know of one outstanding situation when the procedures misfired fantastically, but I would not condemn the whole procedural process simply because, in one glaring instance and possibly a couple of others, it had misfired because of given human circumstances.

It strikes me that the University system on recruitment, on merit increases, on promotions has been born out of many years of experience and is focused upon a search for, and a continuity of, the most highly qualified personnel, and in the way in which the procedures are laid down and the work

^{innovation}
~~immolation~~, and, since we were going to be, above all, an innovative and a forward-looking and a creative campus, we didn't want to be subjected to that kind of drag. Well, as you know, in 1968 and '69, when not only the innovators lost control of the Senate, but the conservatives, such as some of us had become by the shifting of the spectrum at that time, we had to work very hard and very diligently over a number of months between 1969 and 1970 until at long last we finally got a mail-ballot procedure back in the operation of the University Senate so we could ward off some of the most outrageous proposals made and passed by the Senate under conditions which were extremely unrepresentative of the conduct of the University affairs.

McCULLOCH: We didn't get it back; we put it in for the first time.

MEYER: Oh, that's right. I'm sorry. We put it in for the first time. What I meant when I said, "getting it back," I meant the idea had been discussed and had been rejected, and in that sense we got it back. But I don't think that at the time we had those meetings anybody could see there might ever be a situation where a UCI Senate would be functioning with some 30 members present out of then a total of possibly 200 faculty members, and within those 30 members would be a very determined core of possibly two thirds representing then 20 individuals of a particular extremist point of view. And then there was no check upon these operations at all back to the general faculty.

The question might be raised, why weren't the members there? Well, the members weren't there because they had found it so offensive to go into Senate meetings that had turned, in some cases, into outright tavern brawls and the hurling of insults and the outrageous conduct of given individuals that there was a general tendency of people to turn off and simply not show up. And under those circumstances a determined tiny minority could indeed, and did for a period of about six months, take over the operations of the

Senate, legislate for the campus in terms of what allegedly the faculty stood for. And we were able to check the excesses of this thing only when, by considerable struggle, we finally got the mail ballot back into the Senate operation. By and large I think that was the single and the only thing that occurs to me at this point. I've never been a particular student of the procedural and the parliamentary and other things of Senates and their operations. There may have been some other points that others would comment on, but this is the one thing that stands out in my memory.

McCULLOCH: I talked with Abe Melden, who had been on the small committee that drew up the bylaws, and he had a sophisticated knowledge of what they were trying to do.

The question I am asking next, are there any bylaws you feel we should change in our UCI Senate? I'm really saying now. We got the mail ballot, as you say, about 1970. Is there anything else you feel we might do? I know you are a pretty faithful attender of the Senate.

MEYER: But I've lapsed badly in the last couple of years. I've been hardly faithful at all.

McCULLOCH: Well, there haven't been many meetings. They've canceled meeting after meeting. We just meet once in two or three months now.

MEYER: First of all, I simply don't know enough about it. I have not been enough of a student of these problems, and inevitably there are issues and circumstances, and therefore I would have no suggestions to make in terms of the way in which the bylaws might be changed.

I think the question of faculty behavior in the Senate still remains a question, and I was just doing a tally the other day of the recent elections to Senate committees, and I find that, even though less than one third of our faculty are presently members of the local chapter of the American Federation of Teachers (the union), the union at this point has occupied

more than three fifths of the offices on the Senate committees, and the union in fact controls the crucial committees, which is to say the Budget Committee (five out of six members of the Budget Committee are union members) and the Committee on Committees, which of course is crucial in the appointments that are made to vacancies.

There was a period of time there in which Murray Krieger and I and three or four other people, on the basis of a very informal but nonetheless a very intensive operation, were able to turn the Senate around by developing a telephone-and-message network, and this particularly happened in connection with the vote on the mail ballot. We almost singlehandedly turned the Senate around on that issue. Well, nowadays this kind of network is over in the hands of the union. It operates in a much more transparent and automatic way there in the way in which the word is moved around, and it has been my feeling since '70-'71 that, if there were other members of the Academic Senate who were not in the union who wished to develop something in the way of a more coordinated stance in relationship to personnel on committees and operation of the Senate, it was up to them to pull themselves together.

For two or three years Murray Krieger and I and our network were in operation (somewhere I've still got a pattern of all the people who were in that network and how we called them and how we operated and one thing or another, which, in terms of the informal history of the University, might be a very useful little piece of information, but I don't have it at hand right here).

I told Murray Krieger in 1971 that we were over the crisis, we had done our share to help right and stabilize the Senate vote again, and I, for one, didn't feel that every January I would be back at the post at the telephone, spending hours and hours calling people, talking about a slate of one thing

or another; this would have to become a matter of more general concern. It has not become a matter of more general concern as I just indicated by the way in which there is the discrepancy between the number of faculty who are in the union, which is roughly a third, and the number who are in the Senate, which approaches two thirds.

The AAUP and the University Faculty Organization, or some such name, that speak for the other side of the spectrum, have in no sense yet developed a kind of system or a kind of operation with which to meet the challenge of the union, and I don't think they show any sign of doing it. I don't know that they have the time, and I don't think they have the sense of urgency or the sense of hierarchy and management and operation to do it. I feel very pessimistic on that score. Well, that has nothing to do with the bylaws.

McCULLOCH: No.

MEYER: This is the way in which, within the functioning of the Academic Senate, things are being conducted.

McCULLOCH: Yes, I see. In what areas, Henry, do you think you've had the greatest successes? I'd like you to talk now about the program in history that you not only envisaged, but put into effect, the recruiting that you did--I think excellent recruiting. I often think, for example, what the difference would have been to all of us if Carl Degler, your first choice, had come aboard as a senior Americanist, as a professor. Would you talk a little about your vision of the program?

MEYER: Well, as you know, Sam, in those bygone days when you and Arthur and I sat down as a trio and started thinking about what we hoped we might do with the department, we were living in an academic and historical frame of reference that has totally changed in the subsequent decade. Nonetheless, we were very much interested at that time to move in one direction

in which a great deal of work in history in this country has indeed moved since then, to get away from a national-history orientation with emphasis upon subject matter towards a more process-oriented study of history and historical information. The nation and the state no longer would be the major point of focus when we're trying to understand the significant processes of history by topical approaches, by comparative history approaches, by analytical rather than narrative approaches to our work. This was just in the beginning stage at that point.

Nowadays in our department we talk a great deal about history and theory. I certainly have no pretensions to think very much about, or to introduce, notions of theory towards which one would try to align, at best, or at worst bend the historical information that one had.

I think we were turned on by an idea of what in those days we called a genre approach to the study of history, and we made some initial attempts which were never, I think, terribly successful, but I think they were useful attempts to try and factor out what we would have considered to be the significant kinds of history, significant genres of history, that one might want to pay attention to, so that one could study the genre not irrespective of the subject matter, because I think this would be self-destructive in the longer run, but that one could study a genre of history, be it topical history, be it biographical history, be it comparative history, or be it a theme in history, without being terribly concerned as to which nation we studied the material in or in which subject matter, which era, which time segment we studied it in. The important point was that we focused upon the process, the genre we were dealing with, and that we could relate this to a subject matter in which we had presumably a considerable amount of competence that we could bring to bear on it.

Now, this has a real disadvantage in that it caused a fragmentation and segmentation and, therefore, an incompleteness in our offerings that was then, and today stands, in considerable contrast to the notion of department building by nations or regions and eras. As a matter of fact, at that time I remember--oh, it must have been the second year out--several students coming to see me to express their indignation that we taught no history of the Westward movement in American history in our program, and at that time I said to the students that we simply had not provided for the hiring of a Western historian in our beginning program because we were seeking to satisfy other kinds of concerns; namely, social and intellectual history in the American field and the history of American foreign relations. We were having very few FTEs that we could fill, we were making a clear discrimination here between what we felt was most important and what we felt was less important, and at these beginning stages there were a number of kinds of things which we obviously could not offer.

Well, we then moved in the direction, as you will recall, of setting up a series of civilization surveys, the emphasis here to be not just upon politics and international affairs but to draw upon the larger cultural and intellectual and social characteristics of the civilizations, and we had the idea that, as we drew up a Western civilization which we called the Western traditions program, an American Social and Intellectual History as over against an introductory American Political History, an Asian civilization program, a British traditions program (an introductory course), a History of Science course, and a Latin-American, we would try to offer most of these in any given year, and that, as our program expanded, we would offer them all every year, but our undergraduate majors would have a choice of two of the six as an introduction to their study of history so that they would not be exclusively involved in the history of one particular society.

I think we made a clear point that we indicated that the students would be inhibited from taking Western traditions and British traditions because these were so closely interrelated, but that they should seek to take, in addition to either British or Western traditions, one of the other kinds of offerings. This also was meant to give us a foothold in the area of the general education work within the School of Humanities, and initially this was accepted by the other department Chairmen, and it produced a sizable enrollment and appeared to be satisfactory in most respects. So there we began then with an interplay of general education with more specialized education.

We had the notion of having a culminating course in the undergraduate major, which also related to an introductory course in the graduate program, of putting American history in relationship to histories of other nations and other societies in an experimental course called America in World Perspectives, in which the effort was made to bring in the expertise and the participation of the various members of the department. I remember feeling very strongly that this was in terms of department morale and in terms of department cohesiveness as important in that kind of a function in order to develop a sense of the common enterprise of the department, even though the vehicle itself might have certain problems within it, as it was to impart information or insights or points of view to the students.

You may recall that we made something of a point, too, that here students on both the undergraduate senior and the graduate level would be urged--indeed, they were strongly pressed, compelled, required--to do an outside paper, using the knowledge that they had gained in the foreign-language work of their choice. Subsequently I became a little more sanguine as to how effectively such knowledge was applied, or indeed if in every case of every student it was that student's knowledge that was being applied.

But it was a useful idea, and, had events continued to move along relatively smoothly in the way in which they began, it might conceivably have developed and outgrown its childhood upsets; however, that was not to be.

And where we stand now in 1974, as I look back upon the program that we developed, I think we have virtually nothing left, except two things--the idea of introductory work in historiography for all undergraduate students and the comparative approach to the study of our working history. I don't necessarily weep for the loss that has occurred, though I regret the painful process by which the changes did occur. That was a certain amount of unnecessary pain.

McCULLOCH: In what area do you think you have had the least successes and why? You've really touched upon some of them.

MEYER: I think I've already touched in passing upon that. I think that it would have been very difficult for anyone in any institution to have tried to construct a program, however well thought out and successful, which certainly ours was not completely, and to have survived the great academic shakeup, the great cultural revolution in American academic circles of the late 1960s. I think one can feel reasonably satisfied that a strong effort was made. The effort for a while was cooperative and well supported by all of our colleagues at all levels, and when I look back upon that brochure that the department helped me put out in the autumn of 1968, Studies in History at UCI, it is not a document of which I am inclined to be ashamed. I think it stands as a good piece in the context of its time.

McCULLOCH: Yes, and I have that very carefully kept and am placing it in the Archives. Next, Henry, what problems do you feel are unique to Irvine, because it's new or because it's a particular campus or for any other reason?

MEYER: Well, I think the problem that relates particularly to the Irvine campus is the one that has come back to haunt us as policy this spring, but that ten years ago was already raised with me by a Principal of one of the schools where one of my children was in attendance when we lived in Claremont. He said to me, "I can't understand, Henry, how you're going to Irvine, a place that is clearly understood in all of the educational institutions, the high schools, from all of the public relations work that has been put out on it, that this is an institution which is going to emphasize sciences, administration, and mathematical computerized approaches to the study of knowledge. Where do you, as a historian, fit into this picture? How could you go to a place like that?"

At that time I did not know the degree to which our public relations were dominated by the kind of influence which Jim March had with our administration and how much of the kind of jargonized public relations work that was coming out from UCI was influenced by the kind of writing that he was doing. I have always felt that Jim March was a remarkably astute, an extremely quick-thinking, and very intellectual kind of individual. I've had admiration for him and a sense of envy that I couldn't approach his own degree of intellectual perceptivity and acuteness of expression on issues of an intellectual academic nature, combined with a sense of being appalled and absolutely angered by what struck me as his total stance of amorality, a remarkable combination of a man of enormous talent and yet committed, it seemed to me, to a manner of going about doing things that I found quite unacceptable.

McCULLOCH: He deliberately created an anarchy, an anarchic organization.

MEYER: Well, I think this is the factual statement that follows from my generalization about him. Well, at any rate, already then one was

hearing this kind of commentary about what was going on at UCI, and in the seven or eight years from 1964 until 1972 there was an ongoing struggle, particularly in terms of work in the humanities and in the fine arts, to broaden that kind of a charge about this University campus from that sort of scientific, mathematical, computerized, ^{now -} ~~anti~~humanistic approach to education into a more generalized campus.

But now I fear that, from the things we hear and the things we read, we are indeed, as we emphasize specialization, reverting back to that earlier pattern, and it appears that the humanities, including history, may not be much more than a service operation to these other emphases. Had I understood very clearly that this kind of thing would happen, I might have thought very hard about making the transfer to UCI. This, I think, is the problem unique to Irvine.

On the other hand, as a taxpayer or as a nonacademic, looking at the University system, I think there is much to be said about the questionable wisdom of trying to set up eight separate general campuses within a state the size of California without raising, as it should be raised, the question of what kind of academic and what kind of other economies and emphases can be made to highlight excellence and academic effectiveness and decrease possibly unnecessary duplication.

McCULLOCH: Very good. Well, what would you do differently, if you had to do it all over again? I ask everybody this question.

MEYER: Well, I'm going to merge that question with the next one that you have provided me with; namely, do I like the liberal arts and sciences organized into schools, or would I prefer a College of Arts, Letters, and Sciences? These two interrelate in terms of my response. I think the one thing that I would do differently--at the time that we made the decision I voted not to do it the way we did in the Senate, but my vote with a few

others

others was overwhelmed by a much larger vote in the other direction; that is to say, I think we lost something very significant in the sense of a general humanistic education when we gave up the idea of a School of Arts and Sciences.

Back in those days, we were misled by the notion (I think we were honestly bemused by the notion) when we were 35 or 40 individuals, all of whom saw each other fairly frequently, that we could overcome by a frequency of personal contacts, of personal interrelationships, not only in the Senate but outside the Senate, Senate committees, ad hoc things of one kind or another, social gatherings, that we could maintain some sense of interrelationship and interaction between the different fields of learning and therefore could dispense with what appeared to be in sum the unnecessarily complicated addition of yet another step in the academic hierarchy called a Dean of Arts and Sciences. But, of course, what has happened is that we have lost that sense of interrelationship. We've lost it in the Senate; we've lost it in the Senate Committees. We don't see each other very much. We've certainly lost it in the sense of any social interrelationship. The sizable efforts which I tried to make to try and bring faculty and nonfaculty together in some kind of meaningful exchange of ideas and points of view within the context of the University Forum show how difficult it is to maintain a faculty that is rushing off headlong in the directions of its specializations or of its schools.

And so by the decision that was made to abolish the School of Arts and Sciences and to stay with the whole idea of five different schools and a number of separate programs, whether by design or by some misunderstanding, has led to a fragmentation. Humpty Dumpty fell off the wall, and I don't see how Humpty Dumpty is ever going to be put back together again, because now it will be more impossible than ever to reestablish some sense of interrelationship.

I think Hazard Adams's idea of a program of the University Studies-- a College of University Studies--which he instituted in 1968 I believe, was a very far-sighted and belated effort to recapture some of the sense of the interrelationship of the various parts that were fragmenting and segmenting. But, as you know, for reasons of funding and other kinds of pressures, this too has faded virtually to extinction.

MCCULLOCH: Just barely going.

MEYER: Yes.

MCCULLOCH: Just barely going. Well, are there any experiences in the early years that we've missed, Henry, that you'd like to comment on? I do have this one question or thought for you. In the Irvine Humanities Review which came out this past fall our first Chairman of the English Department, then the Dean and now Vice Chancellor and soon to be returning to the ranks of teaching full time, when writing about the setting up of our program, comments that there's been a crisis of nerves in historical studies generally, and historians suffer a schizophrenic split between humanities and social sciences, curiously referred to as soft and hard.

MEYER: Well, I'm very much intrigued by something that I don't know about the history of our institution and that is, when and how it was that the study of history was so emphatically divorced and set apart from the work in the other social sciences. You probably have the answer somewhere else. But I think this was really a rather fateful decision in terms of hobbling us in the development of our own work in the history program.

I know from my experience at Claremont, where history was a part of a very loosely and informally organized division of social sciences, that there was a constant, but not terribly antagonistic pull, but a constant pull to emphasize somehow the humanistic aspect of the study of history, saying, "You know we are not totally a social science; we are also a humanity."

Now being in a School of Humanities, the shoe is very much on the other foot where we find ourselves having constantly to say, "We are not just a humanity; we are also a social science," and I don't believe that this leads to any recent crisis of nerve or schizophrenia. I think it grows generically out of the character of our work. We are, perhaps more than any of the other particular subjects in either social science or humanities, really rather interdisciplinary in our concerns and in our environments. I personally have a feeling that, if I sense we are becoming too much social science-y, I try to balance towards the humanities; and, if we become too much humanistic, I try to balance towards the emphasis on the social science aspects of what we are doing.

Now, perhaps that's not a point of view that is shared by very many of my colleagues, where there's a great interest now in so-called social history, and one wonders to what extent such individuals are prepared to deal with artistic or literary categories of evidence in their understanding and in their development of ideas in social history. So that would be my response to that particular matter of the comment made by the Vice Chancellor. I don't think it's anything recent. It may be schizophrenic, but I would say it's a natural, it's a schizophrenia natural to our particular discipline.

McCULLOCH: Well, I'll always remember Charlie Keller, who as you know taught at Williams College for a number of years before going into Advanced Placement and then the Whitney Fellowships. He always referred to history as history and the social sciences; he said it was a social science, but it was separate, it was partly humanities. He always would say, "History and the social sciences."

This last question, are there any experiences we've missed that have come to your mind as we've been talking?

MEYER: No, I don't think I have anything to say on that score. I think there are some implications on that, that are involved in some of the other things that I've said.

McCULLOCH: But I want to say, Henry, that I've always been very pleased that you left Pomona and came to us, that you did set up a very good program, that we did recruit, I think, very well, though we missed, as you know, a couple of very big fish that might, I think, have made a difference to our present department. I think you have a lot to be proud of in those programs. As you say, the first program that we got out, I think, in 1968 and the second program which you got out in ~~1968~~¹⁹69--both of them I think were very fine testimonials of what we were trying to do--the one that was brown and then the one that had the blue cover.

MEYER: I think you'll find that 1968 is the first one and 1969 is the second one; the blue one is the second one.

McCULLOCH: The blue one is the second one, is it?

MEYER: Yes, yes.

McCULLOCH: The brown is the first one?

MEYER: Yes, yes.

McCULLOCH: You're quite right.

MEYER: On the question of what would one do differently, Sam, I think that looking back on it now I would have paid some more attention to recruiting people in the middle ranks and developed something further in the way of balance between beginners or individuals who already had some experience and seasoning under the belt and some of the older people like ourselves.

McCULLOCH: And Lew Hanke.

MEYER: I think this would have given us some more stability when the wear and tear rolled around.

McCULLOCH: I agree with you, and I often think back and wish we had, but we had good reasons at the time for doing what we did and having such people as yourself, Arthur Marder, and Lew Hanke. But we would have needed to do it from the very beginning, in '64, when we went out to recruit.

MEYER: Right, right.

McCULLOCH: Right at the very beginning.

MEYER: Right at the very beginning, yes.

McCULLOCH: Well, thank you, Henry. I really appreciate this. Thank you very much.