

NEW PROBLEMS AND OLD ELITES:
ANOTHER VIEW OF THE JOB CRISIS

Lawrence Stone in his analysis of the job crisis (*AHA Newsletter*, March 1972: 22-27) attributes the "surplus" of Ph.D.'s to "the numerous small and inferior Ph.D. programs that have sprung up largely for prestige reasons in the last ten or fifteen years" and the "enormous programs" in "many of our big state institutions." He envisions a solution in (1) the curtailment of output via an AHA committee advising state legislatures as to doctoral programs below minimum standards and above optimum size, and (2) an alternate degree to the Ph.D. "designed for those who are planning to become college teachers rather than scholars." This avowed exercise in "eugenics" he presents as "a form of academic contraception which would eliminate the weak and not emasculate the strong."

May we offer a view of these proposals from the vantage point of one of the "minor institutions" [enrollment 22,000] "obstinately refusing to allow their new little programs [doctorate initiated 1962; graduate enrollment about 145; faculty 46] to wither away." Relativistic as the profession is, we are confident that no one will dismiss our observations as self-serving any more than they would dismiss Professor Stone's because he writes from the vantage point of teaching at Princeton, which he diplomatically does not name along with Harvard, Yale and Cornell as one of "the most intellectually distinguished institutions which offer the best professional training."

The Nature and Causes of the Crisis

Professor Stone's analysis of the job crisis rests on the unsupported premise that the newer or "weak" institutions are the major source of the Ph.D. "surplus." The statistics do not bear this out.

The number of universities granting the Ph.D. in history has risen in spurts, from about 30 in 1920 to 58 in 1940, and then spectacularly to 85 in 1960 and 122 in 1970. The number of degrees awarded rose to 5884 in the decade 1961-70, the annual output going from 375 in 1960 to 1092 in 1969-70. Through this entire period, however, the production of Ph.D.'s remained concentrated in a relatively small number of large older departments. Of the 13,579 degrees awarded between 1873 and 1970, Warren Kuehl found that 8,011 or 66 per cent were produced in twenty-two departments. For the

eleven years, 1948-57, W. Stull Holt reported that 28 schools awarded 81 per cent of all degrees.¹

Even in the last decade, 1961-70, the small percentage of degrees produced by the new departments is striking. The thirty-two departments founded since 1960, according to Kuehl, "conferred 344 degrees or less than 6 per cent of the total." The forty-seven departments the AHA's Committee on Ph.D. Programs found to be below their minimum standards—crude standards in our opinion, mechanically applied—produced only about 14 per cent of the total. The share of the total of the so-called outstanding institutions fell slightly but the share of the "below standard" schools did not increase. The statistics follow:²

Category of Institution	Number	Percentage of Ph.D.'s Awarded		
		1960-66	1966-67	1968-69
Meeting Committee Standards (Outstanding)	25	63.3	53	55.5
Meeting Committee Standards	39	23.5	32.5	29.8
Below Committee Standards	47	13.2	14.5	13.2

The newer programs obviously have been awarding an increasing number of degrees as they "tooled up" and doubtless they have projected a larger number for the future. They were producing an average of 1.7 Ph.D. degrees a year in 1960-66, according to the AHA statistics. But even if each of the forty-eight (1967) "below standard" institutions projected an annual output of 4 or 5 Ph.D.'s, this would still amount to only 200 to 250 out of a total output of 1100 to 1200. Their percentage of the total thus *might* rise from 14 to 20 per cent.

Two developments, however, would modify such a projection. A number of schools judged "below standard" in 1966-67 would now very likely meet even the inadequate, overly quantitative standards set by the AHA committee. Secondly, the curtailment of input which Stone believes is underway only at the prestige institutions actually seems to be occurring in a variety of schools. Our experience indicates that some students are selecting

¹ Warren F. Kuehl, "Dissertations in History, 1961-70," *AHA Newsletter*, 10 (September 1972): 22-23; W. Stull Holt, *The Historical Profession in the United States* (Washington, 1963, Service Center for Teachers of History, Publication No. 52); "Doctoral Programs in History: A Report," *AHA Newsletter*, 7 (June 1969): 9.

² Generously provided by John J. Rumbarger, assistant executive secretary of the AHA, from a report in progress, August 1972. The "outstanding" schools category presumably follows the evaluations of the American Council on Education. There were forty-eight "below standard" schools in 1967.

themselves out. (We had fewer applicants this past year, although more with stronger backgrounds.) Graduate school administrators are reducing admission quotas. (At neighboring University of Illinois the history department's quota was down 10 per cent.) Financial aid is down. (We lost ten assistantships.) And schools seem to be revising downward their projections for the future,³ although we have no knowledge of the intentions of the "enormous programs" Stone speaks of "which currently admit 100 or more students each year." (We have ordinarily admitted 20 full-time students annually.)

These two developments would mean that in the 1970s the institutions judged "below standard" probably would still be producing only about 15 per cent of the total output. If all these new programs were "closed down as soon as possible" as Professor Stone suggests, how many fewer applicants would there actually be by the following year's AHA job registration desk? Stone's remedy may be something less than a solution; it is like closing the park gate to keep out the crows. Accrediting will hardly solve the problem of the future surplus and it speaks not at all to last year's and this year's unemployed, or the needs of those currently in the Ph.D. "mill."

Reactions to the Crisis

In no discussion of the job crisis thus far have we seen any effort to weigh the consequences to the profession or to higher education of "closing down" the newer programs. Nothing is to be gained by overstating the case. Yet the newer programs, taken as a whole, it can be argued, have made a contribution to the "health" of the profession and historical scholarship, to the goal of equalizing access to advanced education, and to the improvement of the academic quality of their institutions.

First, what little we as a profession know of the sociology of knowledge suggests some correlation of the vitality of scholarship with growth, competition, and decentralization. This certainly was implicit in the 1967 report of the AHA Committee on Ph.D. Programs which looked favorably on "open academic competition and the geographic diffusion of graduate instruction across the land."⁴ It is also the thrust of John Higham's analysis of the "extraordinary proliferation of [historical] scholarship," in the twen-

³ *Chronicle of Higher Education*, May 8, 1972. The Council of Graduate Schools, after surveying its 303 member institutions which account for 98 per cent of the nonprofessional doctorates, concluded that 31,500 doctorates in all fields may be expected in 1975-76 rather than the 50,000 projected by the federal government.

⁴ "Standards for Ph.D. Programs in History," *AHA Newsletter*, 6 (October 1967): 4.

tieth century. "What stands out," he wrote in 1965, "is the diversity of initiative and the relative weakness of centralized direction."⁵

The newer departments, we need remind ourselves, not only train Ph.D.'s, but support their faculties in research and writing by their teaching loads, sabbaticals and research grants, however much all of these could stand improvement. Indeed the faculties at our distinguished institutions have been eager to place their students in such institutions for just this reason. Some newer departments support scholarly journals; their universities support presses; they sponsor conferences, etc.

To what degree these newer centers of scholarship are sources of innovation is difficult to say. In one field, the use of social science concepts and methods, the recent report of the Behavioral and Social Sciences Survey points out that "the newer history departments, those that are not yet major producers of Ph.D.'s" are the most responsive. This is clearly the experience in other countries as well.⁶

In Britain, it is the new universities that have taken the lead in the study of contemporary history, have offered wide geographical coverage, have promoted computer research and similar quantitative excursions, and have sought to concentrate as well as organize their efforts along topical lines (social history, intellectual history, labor history) rather than the conventional chronological and geographic boundaries. The older redbrick universities, and a fortiori, Oxford and Cambridge have been more cautious, but they are following along. Similarly in France, it is the creation of new campuses that is providing for pedagogical experiment and innovations in research. . . .

Doubtless there are other less controversial examples in other fields. It might be fruitful to do a piece of "scholarly demography" for the period since the founding of graduate schools in the late nineteenth century and plot on an academic map the institutions which have been the source of training or centers of activity for innovative scholarship. At the least it can probably be maintained that in the interests of sustaining scholarly pluralism, the profession has a stake in strengthening, rather than "closing down" new programs.

Secondly, the newer doctoral programs inevitably have expanded access to advanced education. Open and fair access to youth from poor families, to blacks, and to women depends as much on the availability of programs as it does upon the elimination of discrimination in the older established pro-

⁵ John Higham, *History: The Development of Historical Studies in the United States* (Englewood Cliffs, 1965), 34 and ch. 2, *passim*.

⁶ David S. Landes and Charles Tilly, eds., *History as a Social Science* (Englewood Cliffs, 1971), 33-34. The survey was conducted under the auspices of the National Academy of Sciences and the Social Sciences Research Council.

grams. A large proportion of the new programs are in "regional" state universities or large urban metropolitan centers. By virtue of their location as well as policy, many draw a higher proportion of their advanced students from traditionally excluded groups. For example, about 35 per cent of our department's students receiving aid are women, as are five of our forty-six faculty, both proportions probably higher than those prevailing in some distinguished older programs, judging by the statistics of the AHA's Committee on the Status of Women.⁷ And whatever their record to date, the newer programs in the big cities are potentially a vehicle for training a large number of black graduate students.

If the profession is still serious about its commitment to training more blacks and women, it must be prepared to make a place for a different kind of student. Of course we should find a place for all the "bright young men" with excellent undergraduate preparation who have planned for years to enter a doctoral program and complete professional training at twenty-five, after three or four years of full-time study. But it is not demeaning to say that there are relatively few such "low risk" black or women students. Rather there are many students of great potential whose aspirations develop more slowly. With uneven undergraduate backgrounds, they are motivated to seek advanced training to the highest level step by step, as they demonstrate their ability and revise their own self-concepts. There is a legitimate question whether the older institutions are willing or able to find a place for such students.

Thirdly, new doctoral programs have played a part in upgrading undergraduate education. They were initiated not only for "prestige reasons" or to meet the "ambitions" of administrators and faculty, as Professor Stone contends, but also as a response to a groundswell in the '50s and early '60s for mass higher education of respectable quality (a temper too easily forgotten). If faculty at the newer institutions follow our pattern, they teach undergraduate as well as graduate courses. This has meant, quite simply, that undergraduates have the advantage of teachers with lighter workloads, a broader choice of courses, more specialists, vastly expanded libraries and professors who do not look on them as second-class academic citizens. Stifle the doctoral programs in such institutions and you stunt a source of strength to undergraduate education. Our prestige universities have so long deplored the intellectual level in the boondocks, one would think they

⁷ *A Report by the Committee on the Status of Women in the Historical Profession, November, 1970* (Washington, 1970), excerpted in "Final Report," *AHA Newsletter*, 9 (September 1971): 16-22.

would think twice about destroying programs which have contributed to raising this level.

The Role of the AHA in the Crisis

The proposals put forward to solve the job crisis thus far resemble the responses to the depression in the 1930s: *cartellization*, a proposal from the established large producers to squeeze out the new small producers, curtail production and guarantee themselves a share of the market (Professor Stone and others); *product differentiation*, i.e. produce another model suitable for the cheaper market (Professor Stone and others); "*share the work*," i.e. divide the shrinking jobs with the jobless (in one form by Staughton Lynd, in another by Stanley Swart and others).⁸ Perhaps it is time to take a better leaf from the 1930s and advocate the obvious, namely, a program of *job expansion*.

Curtailing input and output, we suggested earlier, is already under way, either initiated by departments or forced on them by administrators or state legislatures; accrediting as a means of forcing further curtailments would have minimal effects.

When accrediting is considered on its own merits, and not as a club to destroy the productive capacity of departments, we remain skeptical. If the standards of such an AHA operation are predominantly quantitative as Stone suggests (library size, faculty size, amount of student aid), they will be self-deceiving. Can we not name schools, for example with small departments of high caliber located in great metropolitan centers whose historical resources make up for the limitations of their own libraries? If the standards are crudely applied, as they were five years ago, without so much as a visiting committee, they will be a travesty.

Even if accrediting were carried out on a sophisticated basis, the experience of other professions should give us pause. The experience of the medical profession in the nineteenth century shows that accrediting obviously can be used to raise standards of practice—medical schools are better than schools of homeopathy. But accrediting can also be employed to enforce orthodoxy, thwart innovation, and ultimately, to restrict access, and create artificial scarcity—witness the success of the American Medical Association with this kind of "contraception."

Stone's proposal for a new degree program like the D.A., (product

⁸ For Swart, *AHA Newsletter*, 8 (September 1970); 9 (March 1971): 34-36; 9 (September 1971): 29-31 and mimeographed resolutions, December 1971, AHA Convention; for Lynd, *AHA Newsletter*, 9 (November 1971): 27-29.

differentiation), seems to be based on a false assumption about the Ph.D. degree—that the arts of scholarship are unrelated to effectiveness in the college classroom. For decades now the best of our profession have been trying to convince the public and the educationists of the opposite, namely, that there is a rich interrelationship between training in scholarship (not, of course, merely Stone's "piece of original scholarship") and good teaching. Granted it is not always achieved, but the Ph.D. has always been intended as a teaching as well as a research degree. Improvements in Ph.D. programs are, to be sure, necessary, and universities should continue to experiment with internships and a variety of clinical experiences to improve the teaching component. But to scrap these efforts altogether because "only 30 per cent of all Ph.D.'s ever publishes" and those making "a real contribution to scholarship" are less than "5 per cent" is to misconceive both the traditional meaning of scholarship and the nature of the Ph.D.

Whatever one thinks of accrediting or an alternate degree to the Ph.D., to meet the immediate and anticipated unemployment crisis the AHA should embark on a vigorous, long-range effort to enlarge the total number of jobs in at least three spheres:

First, in government. The country can use a new and expanded WPA historical program. The proposal of Charles Lee, director of archives for South Carolina, to provide matching federal grants to state and local agencies and private institutions to locate, identify, and preserve documents, might be the nucleus of such a program. "In all honesty," Lee writes, "we do not even know what the actual situation is with regard to the records of our nation's past. We do know that it comes close to being a national disaster."⁹

The historical work of the WPA was abandoned in mid stream thirty years ago and many of its materials lost, destroyed or misplaced. Any one who has worked in local historical societies knows that the best of them are understaffed and undercatalogued. Archives can be worse.¹⁰ Three years ago the eighteenth-century tax records in the city of Boston, "Cradle of Liberty," were literally mouldering in a filthy basement lit by one exposed light bulb; at least they were better off than the records of the Overseers of the Poor which were at one time wrapped around the heating pipes of a city building until the Massachusetts Historical Society rescued them.

⁹ Charles Lee, "A National Historical Records Program: A Memorandum," (February 11, 1972) available from the author, summarized in *The American Bicentennial Newsletter*, 2 (June 1972). The proposal has been endorsed by the AHA, OAH and other scholarly associations.

¹⁰ Edward Papenfuse, "The Historian and Local Records: A Fresh Approach to an Old Problem," *AHA Newsletter*, 9 (May 1971): 24-28.

The observance of the Bicentennial of the American Revolution (1971-76) can be the natural occasion of a campaign to "Save our Heritage by '76," a slogan Paul Ward, the AHA's executive secretary, has suggested. There are 3500 historical agencies of one sort or another in the United States. Under the Lee proposal an annual appropriation of say five million dollars for the next five years might easily put two to three thousand young scholars a year to work in historical societies, archives and publications programs.

There are job opportunities in other programs. The projects of the National Historical Publications Commission, for example, could be extended in new directions.¹¹ The Ethnic Heritage Studies Center program, authorized by the Education Act of 1972 (which went through the Congress without so much as acknowledgement of its existence by the AHA) has similar potential in grants for the training of personnel and the preparation of sources.¹²

To accomplish such an ambitious program of job expansion an enlarged joint AHA-OAH Committee on the Historian and the Federal Government would have to function as lobbyist and organize political support throughout the country.

Second, in the colleges and universities. We speak glibly of a "job shortage" and a "surplus" of Ph.D.'s but what are the objective needs for more history teachers? Surely everyone can name departments which have been denied permission to add faculty, which have not been allowed to fill slots that fell vacant, or have had to cut back, dismissing personnel. If departments could meet the need for teachers that objectively continues to exist, would not a sizable share of the 2,000 or so current job seekers be absorbed? And would there be enough historians to go around if even half the 2,573 institutions of higher education (1,676 four-year; 897 two-year) provided the teaching loads, class size, number of historians and type of educational experience recognized as desirable?

The AHA Council recently endorsed the minimum standards for teaching loads recommended by the AAUP, a desideratum of nine credits in undergraduate teaching and six for graduate teaching.¹³ Now let's do

¹¹ See for example, Jesse Lemisch, "The American Revolution Bicentennial and the Papers of Great White Men," *AHA Newsletter*, 9 (November 1971): 7-21.

¹² See *Hearings Before the General Subcommittee on Education of the Committee on Education and Labor, House of Representatives, 91st Congress, 2nd session on H.R. 14910* (Washington, 1970), especially the testimony of Rudolph Vecoli, 70 ff. and Victor Greene, 21 ff. For the provisions, Public Law 92-318, 92nd Cong. S 659 (June 23, 1959) Title IX "Ethnic Heritage Program."

¹³ "Statement on Faculty Workload," adopted by the AHA Council, *AHA Newsletter*, 10 (May 1972): 5-10.

something about it. A new AHA Committee on Teaching Standards might broaden these goals to include the opportunity for undergraduates to have a significant share of their experience with history in small classes, seminars, and self-directed study. We prefer the image of AHA spokesmen testifying before state legislatures on the need to upgrade teaching standards to the one Professor Stone proposes of the AHA fingering vulnerable Ph.D.-granting institutions.

Third, in the community colleges which will continue to be a somewhat expanding market for a number of years. The latest estimate is that only about 8.6 per cent of the country's 78,000 faculty in these colleges have a doctorate, while 77.7 per cent hold M.A.'s (perhaps a third with additional credits), 10 per cent B.A.'s, and 3.5 per cent less. There is strong resistance in these schools to Ph.D.'s: they cost more; their commitment to academic freedom threatens authoritarianism; they often cannot teach effectively at the junior college level.¹⁴ But our successful experience suggests that students free from snobbery with a commitment to teaching can be placed in such colleges and become effective teachers. AHA-initiated committees at the state level could begin a much needed two-way dialogue with community college administrators to break down these barriers.¹⁵

To this point our observations on the current crisis have accepted the premise advanced in Stone's letter, namely that a parity should exist between the number of people trained and the number of jobs available—between supply and demand. But should we not challenge this assumption? Should we reduce input so there will be no discrepancy between available jobs and candidates, thereby guaranteeing the graduates of the "select" schools a position? Or shouldn't the latter have to take on all comers after output? The social advantage of this solution is that it gives no one a guaranteed claim to a high-status, high-income career, but compels each person to perform in a competitive situation. Thus the selection process operates after degrees are granted, rather than before.

And should we not challenge the premise that the Ph.D. prepares students only for teaching, research or work with historical materials. Are we not in danger of adopting a concept of professionalism so restrictive that it

¹⁴ *Chronicle of Higher Education*, January 24, 1972.

¹⁵ The logic of AHA-supported efforts of the past twenty years to improve the quality of high-school history education also leads to placing more suitably trained Ph.D.'s in the high schools, a far more complex problem. Far-fetched as it may seem to some scholars, the level of work in the first-rate high schools is already beyond that of many freshman-sophomore college courses (hence advanced credit) and the pay scale in good systems is superior to many colleges. Work loads are a problem, as is the snobbery of the profession. The well-known history education work of Richard Brown, Edwin Fenton, and Charles Sellers all lead in this direction, i.e. of Ph.D.'s in, as well as working with, the high schools.

implies training historians only to train more historians? Historians have long preached to undergraduates that the study of history is an excellent preparation for careers in law, journalism, and public service.¹⁶ Isn't the argument even more valid at the graduate level? The ability to acquire and evaluate evidence and apply a historical perspective are qualifications for a great variety of jobs, including the dozens of bureaucratic and policy-making positions for which no job descriptions yet exist. What might be the social benefits if more history Ph.D.'s worked as journalists, television commentators, civil servants in the State Department, urban affairs specialists, or United States Senators?

Finally, what ever happened to our brave strictures about vocationalism and narrow utilitarianism? Is there an essential connection between advanced training in history and *any* vocational objective? Less than a decade ago we were talking confidently of a system of higher education in every state which would make it possible for students to pursue education to the highest level, limited only by their ability. Perhaps it is enough that the AHA continue to inform prospective graduate students of the employment prospects they face. If students still desire graduate training, for whatever purpose, then to what extent should the profession protect them from themselves?

It would be a shame if the AHA goes the way of the AMA at a time when our boldest hopes lie in the expanded participation and extended vision which the profession has been striving toward in the past few years.

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¹⁶ *History as a Career: To Undergraduates Choosing a Profession* (American Historical Association, Washington, 1961), 5.

Awards and Fellowships

The Andrew W. Mellon Foundation has awarded grants totaling nearly five million dollars to twenty-four university presses and six independent