

World Affairs: Its Place in the College Curriculum

Don Vassallo

PERHAPS the quality that most distinguishes twentieth-century societies from earlier ones is their interdependence. Almost everything that happens anywhere in the world today affects all men in all places. Technology, in creating the steam engine, telegraph, telephone, radio, and airplane, has for all practical purposes abolished distance and brought men, with all their prejudices and antagonisms, closer together than ever before. Man's inventiveness has made it impossible for the United States to ignore world affairs or to shun the diplomatic game. With distance annihilated, not only men and their goods move with ease around the world, but their ideas also travel fast and far, and they have given rise in international affairs to a new phenomenon—global ideological warfare. The values of democracy are on trial in the twentieth century before a larger jury than has ever before assembled to hear the case for freedom, and the cold war has made it such that a twentieth-century democracy cannot ignore it except at its peril.

Citizen responsibility is not simply a matter of theory. It flows from the truth that the shape of the world affects every man, so that all who would be free must help to mold it. It is not enough in a democracy for engineers to design bridges, physicians to heal the sick, lawyers to prepare briefs, and businessmen to spin the wheels of commerce. They must all be more than merely competent in their specialties; they must also be intelligent citizens concerned with the major issues of their time in all fields.

Colleges, no less than individuals, must take account of our interdependence, and some are doing so realistically. Knowing that man will survive only if he understands the political and social forces in his world, many colleges and universities require their students to take certain courses specifically designed to prepare them for their role as citizens in a democracy. In spite of these developments, most students graduating from American colleges have not encountered world affairs as a cohesive unit within existing requirements. As a result, many schools are graduating a significant number of students each year who are ignorant of world affairs.

Actually most colleges have never really asked themselves specifically if their present offerings do equip students to participate in the great debates of their own time; and many believe that they are at present doing all they can to carry out their responsibilities when, in fact, they are not. The question has perhaps been posed too recently for colleges to consider it thoroughly. But what America's role is and how to play it are questions of the utmost importance; they are questions of the first importance for colleges and universities to consider!

The primary obligation that college faculties have in improving education in world affairs is to determine whether the traditional approaches to the subject, adequate and useful in their own time, still meet the needs of our undergraduates. Just as scholars at the turn of the century had to make room for colleagues seeking to understand and interpret world politics in terms larger than those of law and history, so must scholars today allow for teaching and research in world affairs in terms larger still.

To learn about world affairs, students need an atmosphere where they can begin to see the wholeness of knowledge, where they can take courses that relate the areas of knowledge to one another, and where they understand that even if it is impossible today to take all knowledge to be their province, they can still derive something significant from the entire range of liberal arts and sciences.

Though faculties cannot by themselves remove all the obstacles between them and an ideal world-affairs program, there are some steps they can take toward this objective. They can, for instance, provide courses giving students the opportunity to analyze international problems. Each faculty must determine in the light of its own curriculum how best its students may examine the issues they need to understand as citizens, but some required courses in world affairs are an indispensable part of liberal education in the twentieth century. The conventional introductory course in international relations, offered as it is now primarily with the needs of future majors in mind, is not, however, the most appropriate course for colleges to require. A course in problems of world affairs or in problems of United States foreign policy would, on the other hand, be invaluable.

Scientists alone cannot build a peace; we need also the knowledge, insights, and abilities of philosophers, historians and social scientists. It is the special mission of the liberal arts college to help these insights and abilities, and in a college performing this mission, those who would educate for world affairs can confidently take their places.

A Hero a Day . . .

Greg Shelton

TO FIND a hero, to locate some person after whom one can pattern his life, to create a super-being from the mundane. These are goals of many fine Americans. We are told that many people who are famous today owe their success to the correct choice of a childhood hero—Walt Disney, Paul Terry; Lyndon Johnson, Abraham Lincoln; Charles DeGaulle, Napoleon Bonaparte; Cassius Clay, Cassius Clay; Richard Nixon, William Jennings Bryan; Bobby Baker, Tom Jones. To this list I should like to add my personal super-hero, an outstanding figure from history, a most industrious President of the United States, my soul's idol, Millard Fillmore.