The University of Iowa, as I saw it in 1944, was a strange mixture of avant-garde, sharp young faculty and elderly men gone to seed. The avant-garde aspect was the most striking, especially for one concerned with cultural history. The departments of art history, fine arts, creative writing, and theater were then at the height of their creativity and power, and it would have been difficult to find their equal anywhere else. They formed a contrast with the relative remoteness of Iowa City, the absence of an urban hinterland, and the seemingly endless cornfields which surrounded the small town (the population at the time was roughly 25,000). To be sure, Cedar Rapids, a city of some 60,000 inhabitants, was nearby, connected to Iowa City by an old-fashioned tramway, but in that town there was apparently no notable cultural life which could attract those living in Iowa City, and I remember visiting Cedar Rapids only a few times during my years at the university.

Why then this flowering of the arts at this place and at this time? It was due largely to an inspired dean of liberal arts, Carl Seashore, an old Norwegian, who in the 1930s wanted the University of Iowa to excel in something that was new and affordable, and that other universities lacked. The School of Fine Arts was his creation. I drifted at once into the orbit of its faculty—painters like Philip Guston and poets like Robert Lowell, among others—and in such company I completed my education which, in a serious manner, had begun at Cambridge University.

This education had bypassed the modern in the fine arts. As a historian I did have some sense of historical background in the arts, but this was confined to the classics. And even in Berlin, in a household dedicated to the appreciation of music and art, where the moderns in music were discussed,
modern painting was hardly mentioned. Here, as elsewhere, bourgeois
taste ended with the French Impressionists, joined by a very few Expressionist
painters and composers of the 1920s. As far as music was concerned
my own rejection of the moderns would not change; even today I have no
ear for the new musical vocabulary.

The theater was different, and the newest plays, such as Bertholt
Brecht's *Threepenny Opera*, were eagerly awaited. Thus I did not need
much reeducation about the modern theater. Not only was its avant-garde
accepted in my family, but my brother showed a special interest in the new
and experimental, and I was allowed to share something of this interest. He
had a genuine commitment to theater and film, but one that he was never
allowed to translate into a chosen profession. Just as preoccupation with
history was not considered fit for earning a living, so theater and film were
not considered serious professions which one could enter for a lifetime of
productive and remunerative work. My brother was by no means the only
son of a successful bourgeois family whose life was blighted by the forced
rejection of his real interests for a so-called respectable profession. Much
later, from the 1950s onwards, when I advised students, parents would
come in to my office complaining that their sons wanted to major in history
whereas they should become doctors or lawyers.

The lessons I was taught in Iowa City were in the fine arts and in literature;
those were the departments where I had the most friends and from
which many of my students came as well. Especially when I learned about
modern art my eyes were opened to a new world, one I had not even consid-
ered before. In 1946 and 1947 I attended lectures given by Mary Anne
Holmes, a professor of art history whose explanation of what was then
contemporary art I have never seen equalled. Indeed, members from a vari-
city of faculties attended these lectures, which were not simply another
academic course, but cultural events. She never wrote much, but she is a
good example of the kind of teacher who enriches lives. She left Iowa City
for a post at Ohio State University only two years after I had arrived, but by
then her lectures and my friendships with artists who were actively en-
gaged with their craft had done their work.

My further education illustrates one important dimension of university
and intellectual life which was present then, but seemed often to be missing
in later years. At Iowa one had the feeling of being part of a group character-
ized by a camaraderie of shared interests in which it mattered little to
which department one might belong, even though it was confined, for the
most part, to the humanities. Because of the variety of people who be-
longed to this purely informal group, many from strong departments, like
The Iowa Years

due to the recollection of youth and what it meant, for I was to encounter academic friendships throughout my career, some of them deep and decisive.

The rapid increase in size of the state universities where my academic career was spent made such an ecumenical camaraderie ever more difficult. But the liquidation of so-called core programs for undergraduates, courses which were compulsory and offered only a very limited choice for students, also aided in the fragmentation of the faculty. At Iowa, such courses had provided a constant forum for debate and discussion, not just for all of those like myself who taught them, but for the whole faculty, which had to approve such programs. The fact that lively departments sponsored events in which faculty from different departments took part was also important. I have mentioned the art history lectures, but readings and discussions in the Writers' Workshop must be mentioned as well. Moreover, certain “saloons,” almost in the European meaning of the term, were centers of social and intellectual life. Thus my friends Jean and Alex Kern, both specialists in American and English literature, had just such a hospitable house. There one could often meet the kind of interesting visitors from our town who today are apt to pass through university towns known only to their host department. The very isolation of Iowa City made for an intense intellectual life, even if it also encouraged deep enmities and an undue emphasis upon quirky personality traits.

The Humanities Society deserves special mention: it was a membership society which encompassed all of the humanities and brought most of the distinguished academic visitors to the campus. To give only one example, during the year 1947–48, when I was secretary-treasurer and later president of the society, we invited the poet Stephen Spender, the sociologist Louis Wirth, the philosopher Raphael Demos, and J. E. Morpurgo, the English literary critic. They were paired with our own faculty as discussants and commentators. I vividly remember the time, when I was presiding over the society, that the English medievalist Sir F. M. Powicke, reading from his own autobiography, was moved to tears. The beautiful room in which the society met added to its attraction: the centerpiece of...
the campus was the old state capitol, and the society met in the senate chamber.

The Humanities Society is one more illustration of the relative coherence of the faculty, which meant a speedy integration into university life, and furthered a broadening of one's outlook. The Humanities Society was a forum where one could meet colleagues from departments other than one's own, but faculty meetings also served as a vehicle for acculturation, this time across the entire university spectrum. Eventually meetings of the whole faculty, presided over by the university president, would no longer be feasible in rapidly growing state universities, and would be replaced by an elected representative faculty body. And indeed, at the University of Wisconsin, where I taught next, they were discontinued with the large influx of new faculty members in the 1960s. But at Iowa at this time the whole faculty still met regularly, and the debates were lively.

I took part in these debates, especially in matters concerning the core curriculum. But perhaps my greatest triumph came with a motion I introduced after I had been in charge of the large Western Civilization core course and was subjected for several years to pressure from the athletic department to pass football stars who were either incompetent or too short of time to do justice to their studies. I proposed that football as a part of the university program be abolished, and that instead the Chicago Bears be hired as artists-in-residence, following the model of the artist-in-residence program in the art and music departments. The motion passed, and I got some satisfaction in seeing the usually unflappable president, Virgil Hancher, turn white. Though my motion made the local and national press, it was stillborn. The president managed to circumvent it, and the only lasting result was that I got the reputation of being the scourge of the athletic department. Some five years later when I was interviewed for a position at the University of Wisconsin, sitting at lunch in the University Club with members of the history department, a gentleman came up to the table, shook my hand, and said that he hoped we would get on together. That I was such an important person in the eyes of the head football coach no doubt increased my reputation and caused much amusement among my future colleagues. However, had my motion been enforced, it would have ended, in one place at least, one of the largest sources of academic corruption at football-conscious universities.

Academic involvement and dialogue were helpful not only in my continuing education, but also in further acclimatizing me to the new surroundings, in fostering the feeling that here I might be at home. Social life was not neglected. The social event of the academic year in my first years on the
faculty was the Beaux Arts Ball, sponsored by the art department, a costume ball which seemed quite daring for its time. But the university president, who was never comfortable with anything outside the traditional, saw to the dance's respectability. An order was passed down as to how long a woman's skirt must be for her to be admitted to the ball, and many of us, as a protest, amidst great hilarity, took out a measuring tape and proceeded to measure the skirt of every woman who entered the hall. Other dress codes soon followed, and a few years later the dance was discontinued by the conservative director of the School of Fine Arts, who was afraid of offending the regents and the university administration. He was not himself an artist or art historian, but had been appointed by the president for the sake of public relations. There was bound to be tension between the avant-garde in the School of Fine Arts and the Iowa public. I remember the painter James Lechay telling me that people from the hinterland often asked why he painted green fishes, if in reality this was a color no fish possessed.

But Iowa City itself was much more tolerant. The poet John Berryman, for example, who was visiting the Writers' Workshop, decided one day, dressed in nothing at all, to lead an ostrich down the main street, and no one seemed to take special interest. Just so, Iowa City seemed to mimic Montmartre when the same poet, in a dispute over a sonnet, smashed a beer tankard over a student's head. Of course, not all visitors were this colorful, but many had something to say, or presented attitudes toward life which were quite foreign to the academy, the kind of environment which I knew best.

For several years the poet Robert Lowell and his wife Elizabeth Hardwick were my colleagues. One year, as I remember it, Robert Lowell and I decided to visit some of the forty-nine fundamentalist evangelical congregations active in and around Iowa City. Many were tiny, and when we as guests were called upon to give witness, I used to say to Robert Lowell, "You do it, you are a poet." And he did it very well indeed. But afterwards the poet's and the historian's views would compete in a fruitful discussion.

But what about my own field of history? When I arrived, that department was much less interesting than the others which I have mentioned. Most of my colleagues had been at Iowa for a long time, and their earlier scholarly promise had faded. They disguised this failure through their pomposity or the poses they took. To be sure, the head of the department, Winfred T. Root, appreciated scholarship and had appointed one rather scholarly older, if dry, European historian. Chester Clark was very friendly, but at one point berated me for having put a red cover on my
The Iowa Years

sourcebook for the Western Civilization course, which can tell us something about the atmosphere even before the Cold War had properly begun. He left to join the CIA only a semester after I had arrived. I myself had been instrumental in persuading Root to hire a friend of mine from graduate school as the medievalist. He was an excellent scholar, but, as it turned out, driven by ambition, which increased markedly the competition for a place in the sun, that is, in the grace and attention of the department head, who was an absolute monarch in his realm.

Winfred Root had once been a very promising scholar and was a decent man, but easily swayed. The head of department system no longer exists today—certainly an advance over previous times. Although Root himself was a benevolent dictator there were others who were vest-pocket tyrants. As soon as Root came in to his office he went to a nearby coffee shop, and it was there that one had to visit him if one wanted to get anything done. His two principal senior colleagues were very different. One was a distinguished scholar of the Middle West, Louis Pelzer, editor of the Mississippi Valley Historical Review (my very first publication [a book review] was placed in this unlikely journal). His relationship with Root was rocky, going back to almost prehistoric times, and he played no role in the department itself. But the other senior colleague, an American historian, born in England (which he kept rather secret), was the sort of figure who seems to have vanished from academic life, and were he alive today, would not be taken seriously. Harrison John Thornton had written one book (a company history) in the past and was engaged in writing the university’s history, but in reality his scholarly activity lay behind him. Instead, he was an old-fashioned orator of the kind once popular in the Middle West, not unlike the itinerant preachers who had toured the country providing motivational and uplifting speeches. He still gave such speeches all over the state. However, his oratory carried over into his private life, where it was transformed into a certain pomposity. He took on a weighty demeanor and used many big words where one simple word would have sufficed.

I do not mean to denigrate this kind of oratory, which served as a means of communication at a time when as yet few other media distracted men and women from paying attention. I myself perhaps benefited from the afterglow of this tradition, once I had discovered my talent for public speaking. I began to speak to a wide variety of audiences, from Lions Clubs to Red Cross meetings and high school commencements. The topics also covered a wide spectrum: some, for example, “The Future of Liberalism,” were still related to my profession, if not to my immediate scholarly interests at the time, while others, such as “What Price Free-
domin?" or "Freedom For What?" were mostly inspirational. I shall return to such activities later.

Even aside from these colleagues, there was one other of that older generation whom Winfred Root had brought to Iowa when he became head of the department not long after the First World War. This professor had given up on scholarship and teaching long ago; all that was left of the former promise was, again, a certain pomposity in comportment and language. He was not alone—there was, for example, one professor from another department who must also have given up, and who dressed like an elderly Shakespearean actor, sporting a white mane and a flowing cape. These men may have been eccentrics, but in contrast to the vigorous and active younger faculty they represented a difference that was stark and startling, a warning never to let go (and therefore partly responsible for my writing these memoirs as I am about to enter the ninth decade of my life).

This academic landscape changed drastically in 1947, not many years after I had arrived, when Winfred Root died suddenly of a heart attack. Harrison John Thornton was poised to take his place, but we Young Turks organized to prevent this, aided by a new colleague who was the son of the president of Princeton’s Institute for Advanced Study and who had excellent ties to our snobbish president. William Aydelotte persuaded the president to allow an election to take place for the first time in history. It was organized on the spur of the moment, with ballots gathered in an old hat of mine. Bill Aydelotte was elected chairman (no longer head), not just to make it easy for the president to accept this election, but because he was generally respected. Our choice was fully warranted, for now a new and distinguished chapter in the history of the department began.

Soon new faculty were added, always after a most thorough selection process, and nearly all of them became distinguished scholars and eventually moved on to major research institutions. I used to say that any historian who had not passed through Iowa was not worth his salt. New kinds of history were pioneered, such as the use of statistics in historical research, and an attempt was made to build bridges between history and other social sciences. The old order was definitely dead.

Yet I was once again the insider as outsider: I took part in departmental business and made close friends with many of the new arrivals, but once Bill Aydelotte had pioneered the statistical approach to history, I stood aside from the scholarly discussions. I had no training in mathematics and was not enthusiastic about the nature of this research, especially as its practitioners seemed to find it difficult to arrive at coherent, publishable, analyses. But then, I was at the time leaving the constitutional and legal
The Iowa Years

history in which I had been trained for what is sometimes called the history of mentalities, or, rather, for a kind of cultural history which I tried to make my own, dealing with perceptions, myths, and symbols and their popular appeal. When I talked about my research I had as partners philosophers, literary scholars, and art historians, rather than historians as social scientists. I very rarely joined the almost daily lunches at the Mad Hatter Restaurant, just off campus, where my colleagues discussed problems of historical research.

But I was also put off by their very seriousness. Bill Aydelotte did have a private sense of humor, but in public he was always deadly earnest and I think hardly appreciated it when I made fun of him, or seemed to take research too lightly. His disapproval was often justified, as, for example, when I started playing merry tunes on the complicated calculator the department had acquired for its statistical work. But then, as I have said, I have never been able to take myself too seriously, perhaps as a result of not having been taken seriously as an individual during most of my youth. Yet this attitude has stood me in good stead during crises and kept me from undue arrogance when, in my seventies, quite a few honors came my way. When the laudatio was read I always felt like laughing, “What? me?” Perhaps this view of myself has even helped me look at history more impartially. But at Iowa it kept me from truly entering a community of scholars such as I have not found, at least among historians, anywhere else.

Nevertheless, within this professional context I made my way rapidly, and this without having to spend overly much time in the coffee shop. When I arrived in Iowa City toward the end of the war most of my time was taken up with the Army Specialized Training Program, training soldiers for occupation duty in Europe. These soldiers were divided into two groups, one to occupy part of Czechoslovakia, and the other to be stationed in France. Oddly enough, the groups, though made up of conscripts, were quite coherent: those who were to occupy Czechoslovakia were nice and polite midwestern boys, and those destined for France were for the most part rather aggressive and contentious eastern Marxists. The latter presented a formidable challenge to what was, after all, my own first real teaching assignment. No statement about French history or ethnography was left unchallenged, and I only wished I had spent much more time in Dirk Struik’s seminar on Marxism. But this was certainly an excellent baptism by fire, and I never regretted it (except at the time).

Meanwhile, the College of Liberal Arts had instituted a course on the history of Western civilization as part of the core curriculum. I was assigned to this course, at first teaching discussion sections. This was another
piece of luck in what seemed like a string of fortunate occurrences. The war ended after I had been at Iowa nearly a full year, and the army program of which I had been a part was discontinued. As a matter of fact, all those soldiers whom I had drilled in French or Czech history so that they might be better occupiers were speedily sent to Japan. So ended what must have been one of the more useless war services; but it was not an unusual fate for many of those engaged in warfare, which often does not live up to its customary billing of performing useful service for one's country, let alone saving the country and showing so-called manly courage.

But I was now out of a job. I had been hired for the Army Special Services, and my assignment in the history department had been considered secondary. I was saved by the GI Bill, through which the nation paid for education for war veterans, who now streamed into the universities. This meant in practice lecturing to crowded classes and to an audience which was mature and critical. The Western Civilization course mushroomed rapidly from an enrollment of barely one hundred to over eight hundred by the fall semester of 1949-50. These numbers seem unreal as I write this nearly fifty years later, and yet it was true, and there were many sections taken by teaching assistants. I had in the meantime been enlisted to lecture as well as to teach sections, which meant becoming a full-fledged member of the history department. I never went through a formal appointment procedure at Iowa but simply slid into my new position, at first tentative and scandalously low-paying. But this changed when I proved my effectiveness in the Western Civilization course.

I was now in charge of the teaching assistants, who were at the same time graduate students. Soon I made an arrangement with a colleague at Brooklyn College, then home of some of the brightest students anywhere, but lacking a graduate school, to send students to Iowa for graduate study supported by assistantships in the Western Civilization course. This core course became both my in-house training in lecturing and my vehicle to academic success within the College of Liberal Arts.

Lecturing over a period of years to so many students and at the same time building a reputation as an exciting lecturer meant acquiring skills which stood me in good stead at Iowa, and then later at the University of Wisconsin, though there my classes were never as large. Still, in both universities I managed to build up the freshman course to undreamt-of enrollments. I cannot say with certainty what it was that made my lectures so successful; perhaps teaching is a gift one has or does not have, one that is difficult to teach. But even if this should be so, there are methods and ways of teaching which can be taught and which are of help when standing
The University of Iowa, 1951, after a lecture to a large postwar class

before a class. I was never taught how to teach, nor was I given any advice. Yet I had learned by sitting through lectures at Cambridge and Harvard that boredom is one of the greatest enemies of education. I had to find my own way, and somehow it worked.

Certainly, personality is involved: the more forcible your personality, the easier it is to keep the students’ attention. But a sense of mission is also vital—it will communicate itself to the students. Speaking clearly and having a definite structure to your lectures are necessities. I have been appalled, for example, at how many academics believe that the letter e or the sound “ah” is meant to link words or sentences. I also soon learned to single out a few selected students with my gaze, which seemed to bring all of them nearer. Moreover, it never occurred to me to read my lectures, though I have always written them out in order to have them firmly in mind. There is nothing more apt to be boring, to my mind, than a lecture read before a considerable (and often somnolent) audience. German professors especially seem to read their lectures in an even, unmodulated voice, perhaps because in German the words for lecturing and reading are identical. To give an extreme example: I was presiding over a lecture by a very fine German scholar when I was teaching in Jerusalem. The thick
The Iowa Years

sheaf of paper he brought to the podium heralded no good, and indeed he went on and on in his monotonous voice. Soon people began to leave until only two or three of the audience remained, but he went on reading until the bitter end.

You might as well not lecture at all, and save yourself the trouble, if you cannot hold your audience and interest them in what you have to say. Some of my colleagues have been shocked when I have likened lecturing before good-sized undergraduate audiences to a show; you must communicate knowledge, but not in the manner in which I was taught at the Gymnasium: dry facts are soon forgotten. You have to use your voice, even body language, to focus attention and communicate what I like to call the rhythm of history. This means a certain simplification, but once the students have been given a structure, a way to approach and to make some sense out of events, they can fill in or even reject viewpoints and find a structure on their own.

I have found it most effective to teach history within clearly defined parameters of geography and chronology so that the subject matter can have a certain natural coherence. The course entitled “The History of Western Civilization” was in reality a modern European history course with a bent toward cultural history. At first it was supposed to combine U.S. and European history, but this did not work well, not because I myself knew little about U.S. history, but rather because the subject matter was too diffuse and lacked the necessary coherence.

My curricular battles with colleagues centered upon my realization of this, as there was constant pressure to change the core program into one of “Great Books” or into a smorgasbord of academic fields and cultures. What is called multiculturalism today is fine in theory, but in practice it is apt to leave the student without any one solid foundation from which he can extend his knowledge. At that time I won my battles, largely owing to the success of the course. Today I would be sure to lose in the name of multiculturalism. Students should learn about cultures other than their own, but they will do it better if they have a firm basis from which to proceed.

At first my senior colleagues took turns lecturing in the course, but they soon preferred that I cope with the ever larger audience. Through the way in which I ran the course I got into the good graces of the dean as well, and about three years into my stay at Iowa I decided to take my fate into my own hands in a rather daring move in order to obtain tenure. I was afraid of the jealousies that had begun to build up among my colleagues, but, above all, I was tired of waiting to take this hurdle and decided to face it at once.
The Iowa Years

(Impatience, as I said earlier, has always been a characteristic of mine.) I knew that Earl McGrath, the dean at the time, was very keen on the success of the core program, and therefore I decided to risk a bluff. One day when I met him on the stairway of the hall where both his and my offices were located, I mentioned that I was seriously thinking of leaving Iowa and moving east. I said nothing about an offer, which would have been an outright lie; nevertheless my little bombshell worked, and I was immediately assured of promotion to tenure.

The success of the course had another far-reaching effect, however, aside from my promotion or even my friendship with this remarkable dean. It proved important for the offer I was to receive from the University of Wisconsin in 1955, by way of an episode having to do with athletics. When the new football coach was given a Cadillac by alumni as a welcoming present, students and some faculty decided to protest this overvaluation of athletics at the university. One day as I climbed onto the platform in order to lecture to my class, by then numbering more than five hundred students, some students and fellow faculty members surprised me with a mock ceremony, presenting me with keys to my old, beat-up Dodge. This immediately became a media event, as we would say today (the Des Moines Register even ran a front-page cartoon about it), and persuaded my future colleagues in Madison that I must be a good teacher, and the right person to build up their own freshman history course.

I taught not only the Western Civilization course but also early modern European history, and began to have graduate students besides. When I began at Iowa I had sixteen hours of classroom contact, much of it in discussion sections [at a salary of $1,800], and while this load did diminish later, I remember it with awe. Not only was I expected to publish, but I was still writing my doctoral thesis. With energy that today I can barely imagine, between 1944 and 1946 [when I received my doctorate] I worked nights to finish my thesis and managed to do so in a year and a half [without that tenure would have been possible], and what is more, to publish my first two articles.

I suppose being focused helped, and I was totally devoted to my academic tasks; that was my little world, and my fantasy life had to make up for the rest. Ambition was crucial here as well; I was determined to make a mark in my profession, to make good, as it were, and this ambition never left me. Was it due to a very differently oriented youth? Or to belonging to a minority group where it was always emphasized that Jews had to do better than everyone else? (Being gay was of no concern as yet—the idea that homosexuals could constitute a legitimate minority was still far in the fu-
I do not want to go in for self-analysis here; perhaps such ambition was just part of my character, like my drive to accomplish the tasks put before me, or my impatience with anything that moves slowly, from people to objects. Standing in line is torture, and I have never willingly waited for a table in a restaurant. Fortunately, however, I have been able to subdue such personality traits when it came to teaching or research, though somewhat less as the years wore on.
The Iowa Years

My research certainly required patience and concentration, for it was based on a close reading of the sources. That held for my doctoral thesis as well as for other books which I managed to write during my Iowa years. All those books dealt with English constitutional history or political thought in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. These were certainly respectable, indeed core subjects at the time, and subjects in which I had been trained at Cambridge, Haverford, and Harvard. That they were also far removed from my own origins may have played an unconscious role as I tried to dive into my new Anglo-Saxon environment.

But even at that time I was already looking ahead and starting to investigate National Socialism, a subject which I had avoided, perhaps because it touched me so closely. Nearly two decades had now passed since I had arrived in the United States and there was no more need to immerse myself in a respectable Anglo-Saxon subject in order to distance myself from my past as an outsider. I have no good explanation for my switch to modern history, which occurred even before my position at Wisconsin locked me in place as a modern historian. Surely my interest in the more recent period had always existed, but my graduate training had been entirely in the earlier periods of European history. History was divided into clearly marked fields of study, and one was not allowed to trespass. I was the early modernist and at Iowa there was no way to break out (except in the course on Western Civilization, where I already began to emphasize the fascist experience).

If at Cambridge I experienced my political awakening, at Iowa I completed a vital step in my self-formation; I became truly mature and my life took on the direction which it was destined to keep. My own family receded still further into the background. I was now largely self-sufficient, earning a living and doing what I liked thousands of miles from the Eastern Seaboard where all of them lived.

And yet the last reunion of the immediate family, my mother and us three siblings, took place in Iowa City, in 1948, on the occasion of my mother's sixtieth birthday. I was now a homeowner and could show off this sign of independence as well. I will not say a "proud" homeowner, for the house itself was rickety, though it possessed a flowering cherry tree, and the "easterners" did not have to know that I had to get up twice in the middle of the night to stoke the furnace. They seemed duly impressed at the time (making no comparisons to Berlin or Schenkendorf). This was the first and the last time my mother penetrated so deeply into America. I remember this as a successful gathering, but from now on the four of us
The family celebrating Felicia Mosse’s sixtieth birthday, Iowa City, 1948
would never again get together for an uninterrupted happy period of time. Here too Iowa City was both an end and a beginning.

Iowa City was also a vital step in my Americanization, in a manner which few refugees even of my generation have experienced. It helped that there were relatively few refugees on the faculty. Kurt Lewin, the well-known psychologist, was still teaching during my first year, but our acquaintance was fleeting. Gustav Bergmann in philosophy was the most visible refugee on campus, a distinguished logical positivist, yet a difficult person, opinionated and combative. He might have said the same about me, but, as a matter of fact, hardly any of his colleagues managed to get along with him. We clashed straight away about the Western Civilization course and much else besides. Kurt Schäfer was a largely self-taught geographer with connections to the Ullstein publishing house in Berlin before his emigration. The refugees to whom I was closest were at Iowa for only a few years. René Wellek, the literary critic, was, like so many literary scholars of the time, also a historian, but one with a broad outlook, unlike Leslie Hotson, who had helped train me. Hans von Hentig I knew best, perhaps because I have always been attracted to willful but learned and intelligent outsiders, endowed with a fertile imagination. He fitted all these categories. Hans von Hentig was a political refugee from a distinguished family, whose military bearing belied his often quite radical views. He could have served as a caricature of the Prussian officer in the cornfields. Nothing would have been more mistaken. He was a criminologist by profession, but he had also written books on such topics as how nations go about making peace. His political views in the two years I knew him tended toward the Left, even toward anarchism. After the war he and his wife returned to Germany, and I unfortunately lost sight of them.

Clearly, I lived apart from the small circle of refugees who had formed the cohort of my parents’ generation. But that was not all: thanks to my ability as a speaker, I was drawn into the wider world outside the university environment. The university encouraged some faculty members to speak to groups in the state, such as Rotary Clubs, Lions Clubs, and other civic associations, as well as to give commencement addresses at high schools. For this purpose it issued lists of possible speakers and their subjects; thus, for example, in 1949, my subject for commencement speeches was “The Citizen and World Peace,” while my more usual topic was simply “What Price Freedom?” Invitations came mostly from rural areas or very small towns. The graduation classes were small, sometimes a mere dozen students. As this was supposed to be part of university relations, you got some
instructions; thus, for example, you should be the first to shake the new graduates’ hands. I improved on that by reading the names of the small graduating class ahead of time, and then remarking that what I had to say was meant for John, LaVonne, or David. The ceremony itself was standard: the processional, a song (usually “Ah Sweet Mystery of Life”), my speech, a valedictory, and a blessing either before or after the speech (“Bless the speaker and his message”). The class flower usually graced your lapel. I remember being shocked only once by a rapid change of pace, when in Oskaloosa a band appeared beneath the platform, nearly blasting me out of my seat with “Jazz at the Philharmonic.”

I could fill many pages with my adventures on this commencement circuit. Sometimes I had to go search out the superintendent of schools or the principal from a local bar or diner and bring him to the ceremony. On one memorable occasion, when the priest rose to say his blessing, an unmistakable odor of whiskey wafted across the podium, and indeed a few seconds later the priest collapsed on the stage. A heart attack, the president of the school board told the alarmed students and parents. Nor did all the audiences listen to the speaker’s message with rapt attention. A graduate assistant who drove me around one year as I gave these speeches told me that while, in that McCarthy era, I was extolling freedom, the talk in the auditorium was all about hog prices. Still, I got to know a part of Iowa and some of its people, an experience which few German Jewish refugees would have known.

During the academic year I spoke before many other groups as well, most of them voluntary associations that needed a speaker. Women’s clubs were among the most active of such groups. Many were reading circles that invited so-called experts to fill in the background of the books under discussion. There was a definite social hierarchy among such clubs in Iowa City, dependent upon the social status of their members. I remember that the Nineteenth Century Club was considered the pinnacle in Iowa City because the university president’s wife was a member. It was an honor to be invited to speak. Alas, I confused the name of the club with the talk I was supposed to give about their reading and made a fool of myself by talking about the nineteenth century in general. That kind of woman’s network seems archaic at best, but the role which it played in such small towns is worth recalling.

However, I became better known in the state through a Sunday radio program which I was asked to moderate. Sponsored by the Iowa Bar Association, it was broadcast from Des Moines, the capital of the state, which at that time, for someone driving on narrow Iowa roads, was several hours
The Iowa Years

from Iowa City. I drove back and forth one evening a week for about a year, not without mishaps; once my old car broke down and I had to spend the night in a barn, in closer association with the Iowa countryside than I ever desired. The program itself was an interview program, mostly of politicians—for example, present and past Iowa governors.

The U.S. senators were interviewed as well, and here I once had to handle a situation not so different from that which the priest had brought about at commencement, except that the program had a very large audience. During the interview the junior senator from the state suddenly slipped off his seat and under the table. The smell which he had given off was familiar, but I could hardly say publicly that the senator had passed out in a drunken stupor. That would have been construed as a partisan remark. So, on the spur of the moment, I took a leaf out of the earlier experience and said that I was very sorry, the senator had just suffered a light heart attack. I thought that such presence of mind deserved praise, but instead the president of the university, a former corporate lawyer not noted for his courage, saw to it that the bar association ended my part in the program. Perhaps there was even some justification for this action—the fear that a junior, and, from his point of view, radical, faculty member interviewing all manner of state officials might become a loose cannon.

I was grateful for all these experiences, though they were frowned upon as unscholarly by several of my colleagues; one so involved in public speaking must be neglecting research. To be sure, the events at which I appeared required what was called motivational speaking, which made reputations in America earlier in this century and is today once again a lucrative industry. Such speeches were not especially lucrative at the time, but they were an excellent exercise in effective lecturing, in capturing rather than boring audiences. The critics failed to understand that this speaking included a style, a way of doing things, which in my case contained a serious, often scholarly core. The motivational speeches about freedom, after all, were given against the background of McCarthyism, which was then at its height, thus they also had a didactic purpose.

All this activity outside the university fed my dream of attaining some public office, of being elected to, or at least running for, a political position. But first I had to become an American citizen, and this was accomplished in April 1946 at the Johnson County Courthouse. I had been without proper nationality ever since I had been stripped of German citizenship thirteen years earlier. We used to say half jokingly that only those naturalized west of the Mississippi could claim to be true red-blooded American citizens, and I just managed to make it, the Mississippi being an hour’s drive to the
east of Iowa City. The dream of holding elected office might be a final act of integration, of acceptance, but I was certain that I would enjoy the campaigning as well.

Meanwhile, I addressed political groups on campus. But I also took an active part in the 1948 presidential campaign of Henry Wallace. Wallace, a native of Iowa, ran as a third-party candidate against Harry Truman and Thomas Dewey, and I made quite a few stump speeches for Wallace and his running mate, the "Singing Cowboy," Senator Taylor from Idaho, who also visited Iowa City. The result was a complete fiasco; as I remember it, Wallace got some 12,000 votes in his own home state. Why did I actively support him instead of Truman or Dewey? I still believed in the possibility of avoiding the Cold War; one did not have to be a fellow traveler to fear what a new war might bring. But it also took time to shake a pro-Soviet stance that had begun with the antifascist movement and continued during the war with appeals to aid Russia. Today I know that Truman's policies were correct, that a line had to be drawn in the sand, but then he seemed aggressive and belligerent. I must also mention my delight in being an agent provocateur, constantly provoking the establishment, breaking taboos in order to arrive at answers to problems. This posture was a crucial part of my teaching as well: history was supposed to demystify reality, to probe and penetrate the myths people live by. Here I was taking advantage of my outsider position rather than attempting to assimilate. I was always torn between these two attitudes, a dilemma to which I will return.

Did I make up for the Wallace campaign when four years later I was listed as speaking for the Republican Party? I was impressed by Senator Taft, then a candidate for president in the primary—by his stand for civil liberties, by his kind of conservatism. I had reason to be impressed, for conservatives like Taft seemed to approve of my repeated attacks on the House Un-American Activities Committee. Indeed, at the high noon of McCarthyism, when, in my capacity as president of the Iowa Association of University Professors I organized a public meeting opposing the congressional witch hunts, the main speaker at this anti-McCarthy meeting was no radical or even a liberal, but the finance chairman of the Iowa Republican Party! Here the radicalism of the Right was as abhorrent as that of the Left. While I myself was much more radical in social and economic matters than the speaker, I did hold fast to a left-liberal position, not unlike that for which the Mosse publishing house had stood in Germany.

There was one time, in 1948, when I had a tiny and fleeting taste of being a candidate for public office. I had come home from some speaking engagement out of town and was lying in bed on election night, listening to
The Iowa Years

the results on the radio. Truman was winning, and then suddenly I heard
that Mosse had gotten so-and-so many votes for Johnson County coroner.
I nearly fell out of bed. What had happened? While I was out of town,
colleagues, led by a close philosopher friend of mine, an expert in the his-
tory of skepticism, had hired a van with a loudspeaker to proclaim my
candidacy, and as a hoax had started a write-in campaign. It was more
successful than they had expected, and, being unfamiliar with Iowa law,
they were ignorant of the possible consequences. If I had won, it would
have cost me several thousand dollars to hire a doctor to do the examina-
tions, and if I had refused to take office, the same sum would have had to be
paid as a fine. As it was, I lost, but while the election was being decided, the
annual faculty reception given by the president took place, and amidst
general hilarity I was “Mr. Coroner” at least for that occasion.

All this while I was living in the somewhat ramshackle house I had
acquired, renting out the lower floor. Here the spirit of the frontier, which
had frightened me so much when I first encountered the main street of
Iowa City, seemed alive. The furnace of the house was fueled by coal, and
there was no automatic stoker. So even in the severe Iowa winters, if one
wanted heat, one had to get up twice in the middle of the night and shovel
coal into the big furnace. I had, of course, been totally unfamiliar with such
heating arrangements. This was hot-air heat, and so when a colleague once
told me that one must put water into the furnace to prevent dryness, I
happily poured water down the heating duct. The consequences and subse-
quent discomfort can be imagined.

As a householder I had to learn all sorts of new facts of life, from deal-
ing with plumbers to hiring carpenters (the house was an old wooden struc-
ture). When I discovered that a squirrel had penetrated into my attic
through defective eaves, I was at a loss what to do about it. I borrowed a
hunting rifle and for the first and last time in my life fired some shots. I hit
the attic, but in doing so also shot a hole in the floor through which the
squirrel escaped into the house.

The house itself stood on a rather steep incline on a street which was
part of a much-traveled cross-continental highway. I used to say that I lived
where the trucks changed gears, and in winter I was often awakened in the
middle of the night by some trucker who had gotten stuck on the ice and
wanted to use the telephone. Still, in the end I sold the house for as much as
I had paid for it ($8,000), which, given its rather dilapidated state, was
satisfactory.

Iowa made a valiant effort to keep me when the University of Wiscon-
sin made its offer in the autumn of 1955, but I was ready to move on. I had

148
behind me a journey which had begun a little over twenty years earlier on
the deck of the ferry across Lake Constance between Germany and Switzer-
land, and which had now reached a conclusion. The sense of liberation I
felt then had been fully justified; I had done what I wanted to do and it had
turned out well. Luck had played a part throughout—in the excellent
teaching at Bootham, in my political awakening at Cambridge, and finally
in finding Haverford College. Nevertheless, while it seemed to me that
luck had played a great part in helping me settle down in a profession, still
I had reinvented myself from an uncontrollable child into a respectable
person. Character traits such as a driving ambition asserted themselves,
helped along by the discipline learned from boarding-school life and the
self-reliance necessitated by exile. Moreover, I now believed that I had a
feeling for America—a kind of relationship I had been too young and not self-
conscious enough to experience in Germany, while it had been difficult for
me, as a foreigner, to truly understand England in spite of my love for that
country. But in America, even though there was racism and discrimina-
tion, one was not treated as a stranger and could even enter into politics as
an equal.

The Iowa experience ended a long period of searching and lack of secu-

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