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A Mediator between Two Historical Worlds: Hermann Eduard von Holst and the University of Chicago

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I

In January 1892, the eminent historian Heinrich von Sybel, one of the main representatives of the Prussian school of political historians,[1] advised his friend and colleague Hermann Eduard von Holst to accept a position with the newly founded University of Chicago:

> For a proficient man the decisive factor for the choice of his habitat must be his sphere of action. Concerning your person everything is said with that. . . . As a pioneer of German scholarship you will have an effect in a field of almost unlimited perspective in Chicago. You will not be lost for Germany, however, and you will create a yearly growing market for the best commodity of German production.[2]

Sybel's coaxing recommendation, with its terms "production" and "market" reverberating with notions of cultural imperialism, had its effect on Holst. He accepted the call from the University of Chicago, but it was not the first attempt on the part of an American university to win Holst as a history professor. Other universities had already recognized that Holst would make an invaluable contribution to the development of their still nascent history departments.[3] Since Holst was an American history specialist

1. On the Prussian school of political historians, see George G. Iggers, *The German Conception of History. The National Tradition of Historical Thought from Herder to the Present* (Middletown, Conn., 1983, rev. ed.), 90–123; on Sybel, see Hellmut Seier, *Die Staatsidee Heinrich von Sybels in den Wandlungen der Reichsgründungszeit* (Lübeck, 1961); Hans Schleier, *Sybel and Treitschke* (Berlin, 1965); Andreas Dorpalen, *Heinrich von Treitschke* (New Haven, Conn., 1957). The basic concept of that particular school of historians was the urge to discover ethical forces in history and to use these findings to become involved in political struggles of the present; see Konrad H. Jarausch, *Students, Society, and Politics in Imperial Germany* (Princeton, N.J., 1982), 200.
2. Sybel to Holst, January 4, 1892, box 12, Holst MSS, University of Chicago; quotation translated by the author. Like Sybel, prominent German-American were enthusiastic about the prospect of Holst's nomination. See Henry Villard to Holst, February 2, 1892, quoted in Alfred Vagts, *Deutschland und die Vereinigten Staaten in der Weltpolitik*, 2 vols. (New York, 1935), I:435, fn. 2.
3. These were Johns Hopkins University, Clark University, and the University of Michigan; see Eric F. Goldman, "Importing a Historian: Von Holst and American Universities," *Mississippi Valley Historical Review* 27 (1940):274.

trained at a German university, he was especially qualified for a position at an American university. A German historian with an emphasis upon German history would not have been as attractive, since German history found few American students.[4]

This essay discusses several issues that touch upon the general topic of historical scholarship in the United States and Germany, as well as the development of this discipline and its accompanying structural institutional changes in the last quarter of the nineteenth century. Holst serves as a lens through which we can focus upon common and divergent concepts of historical scholarship in both countries, as well as the impact of these concepts on the structures and institutions in higher education. An examination of Holst leads one to look specifically at the graduate school and, subsequently, at the training of professional historians in the United States. When we speak of mutual influences on higher education, Holst embodies a bilateral transfer. Not only the transatlantic transfer of ideas but also his own sociopolitical and cultural experiences in both countries shaped his mind as a historian. He thus influenced historical thinking on American history in Germany, as well as historical thinking on European and American history in the United States. In one aspect, however, the transfer was unidirectional: his ideas and ideals of higher education concerning the training of historians, derived from his German university experience. At the University of Chicago he tried to implement his notion of graduate training, which included high standards for both MA and Ph.D. exams. Beyond Chicago he endeavored to homogenize standards and foster close academic cooperation between major American universities.

How much influence do historiographical developments have on institutional changes and structures? This seems to me one of the core questions when we deal with mutual influences on higher education.

II

A brief look at Holst's biography[5] permits a better understanding of the context of his nomination as a head professor in the history department of the newly founded University of Chicago. Son of a Lutheran minister, Holst was born in 1841 in Livonia, a Baltic province of Russia. Although Russian

4. Richard S. Barnes, "German Influence on American Historical Studies, 1884–1914" (Ph.D. diss., Yale University, 1953), 129.
5. The most extensive Holst biography hitherto is Hans-Günter Zmarzlik, "Hermann Eduard von Holst," in Johannes Vincke, ed., *Freiburger Professoren des 19. und 20. Jahrhunderts* (Freiburg im Breisgau, 1957), 21–76.

by birth, Holst's cultural and educational environment was unequivocally German, in which he was totally absorbed. Despite the recommendation of his teachers at the University of Dorpat that he continue his historical studies under Georg Waitz in Göttingen, he characteristically chose as his mentor the political historian Ludwig Häusser at the University of Heidelberg, a leading proponent of Prussian-German nationalism.[6]

In 1866, one year after he received his doctorate, Holst found employment as a tutor in a German family in St. Petersburg. His strong belief that history and politics were one inseparable entity caused him to publish a political pamphlet condemning Russian absolutism.[7] The pamphlet prompted his exile, and subsequently he took refuge in the United States from 1867 to 1872. There, after initial hardships, he succeeded in becoming assistant editor of the *German-American Encyclopedia* project.[8] Continuing to adhere to his conviction that a historian should also be involved in current political affairs, he soon became active in party politics and in endeavors to increase the political and cultural importance of his countrymen in the United States.[9]

At first, he actively supported the Republican Party in its fight against Tammany Hall, but later he joined the oppositional Liberal Republican Movement, whose main goals were the hindering of the reelection of Republican President Ulysses S. Grant and his allegedly corrupt administration, the peaceful reintegration of the South into the Union, and the reform of the Civil Service.[10] Through his political involvement, he made the acquaintance of prominent Americans and emigrated Germans, among them Horace Greeley, Frederick Law Olmstedt, the Forty-Eighter Carl Schurz, who at that time had already advanced to the U.S. Senate, and Friedrich Kapp, also a Forty-Eighter.[11] A lifelong friendship connected him with the

6. See Eric Goldman, "Hermann Eduard von Holst: Plumed Knight of American Historiography," *Mississippi Valley Historical Review* 23 (1936–7):512. On Häusser, see Erich Marcks, "Ludwig Häusser und die politische Geschichtsschreibung in Heidelberg," in *Heidelberger Professoren aus dem 19. Jahrhundert: Festschrift der Universität zur Zentenarfeier ihrer Erneuerung durch Karl Friedrich,* 2 vols. (Heidelberg, 1903), I:285–354; Ludwig Häusser, *Denkwürdigkeiten der Badischen Revolution* (Heidelberg, 1851). Häusser was a former member of the Baden legislature.
7. The pamphlet was entitled *Das Attentat vom 4. April 1866 (16. April) in seiner Bedeutung für die kulturgeschichtliche Entwicklung Russlands. Eine kulturhistorisch-politische Studie* (Leipzig, 1867).
8. The project was directed by Alexander J. Schem, *Deutsch-Amerikanisches Konversations-Lexicon,* 11 vols. (New York, 1869–74).
9. Zmarzlik denies Holst's endeavors to coordinate German-American efforts to influence American politics; see Zmarzlik, "Holst," 36. However, Holst's letters during his first stay in the United States indicate his strong involvement in precisely these affairs.
10. For the general history of this oppositional movement and the involvement of German-Americans in it, see Jörg Nagler, "Deutschamerikaner und das Liberal Republican Movement 1872," *Amerikastudien/American Studies,* 33 (1988): 415–38; see also the letters from Holst to Schurz during this time in regard to this movement, Holst to Schurz, June 25, 1871, and August 24, 1871, Schurz MSS, Library of Congress.
11. On Kapp, see, most recently, Wolfgang Hinners, *Exil und Rückkehr: Friedrich Kapp in Amerika und*

latter two, and Kapp was to become his protegé in the United States, as well as in Germany after Kapp's remigration. Through his own historical writings and political influence, Kapp was well connected with major American and German historians as well as with politicians, among them George Bancroft and Heinrich von Sybel, and such liberals as Ludwig Bamberger and Franz von Roggenbach. Kapp used his influence to Holst's advantage, and he made Holst his successor as the correspondent of the *Kölnische Zeitung* from 1869 to 1871.[12] But much more important for his future career and for establishing his prestige as a historian was the assignment Holst received in 1869 (again through the mediation of Kapp and the endorsement of Sybel): to write a study on popular suffrage and government in America for a German audience.[13] Sybel, as the editor of the *Historische Zeitschrift,* knew Holst through an article he had published in this prestigious journal in 1867.[14] After some initial research, Holst soon realized that the scope of this enterprise was beyond the capability of one single historian. He wrote his patrons – a group of Bremen merchants – that he would prefer to write a constitutional history of the United States, which from his point of view would be manageable. He had found the subject of his *magnum opus,* which would establish his reputation as a historian in the United States as well as in Germany.[15]

Once Holst had changed the format of his assignment into a true research project, Sybel approached Holst in order to emphasize the salient political relevance this work could possess for current political developments in Germany. This notion of doing history as a comment on current politics was characteristically symptomatic of the Prussian school of political historians. As Sybel stated in a letter to Holst, one of the major purposes of this con-

Deutschland 1824–1884 (Stuttgart, 1987); see also Hans-Ulrich Wehler, *Friedrich Kapp. Vom radikalen Frühsozialisten des Vormärz zum liberalen Parteipolitiker des Bismarckreiches, Briefe 1843–1884* (Frankfurt/M, 1969); Edith Lenel, *Friedrich Kapp* (Leipzig, 1935). For Kapp's relationship with Holst, see the numerous letters from Kapp to Holst in box 12, Holst MSS. The author is preparing an annotated edition of the Kapp–Holst correspondence. Kapp's life in many ways resembled Holst's: They were both émigrés, both shared political experience in the United States and Germany, and both were writers on American history. When the Franco-Prussian War broke out, Holst became secretary of the German Patriotic Aid Society, with its seat in New York, and strove for a nationwide organization. In his function as secretary, he cooperated closely with Friedrich Kapp in Berlin. Kapp had become the organization's representative and was in charge of distributing the collected money to the German victims of the war; see Hinners, *Friedrich Kapp,* 243–9.

12. His articles for this newspaper are in box 2, Holst MSS.
13. See Kapp to Hermann Kruse, March 6, 1869, Kapp MSS, Library of Congress; see also Sybel to Kapp, June 25, 1870 (copy sent to Holst from Kapp), box 12, Holst MSS.
14. The article is "Ludwig XIV und die Hugenotten," *Historische Zeitschrift* 14 (1867): 277–316.
15. Charles R. Wilson, "Hermann Eduard von Holst," in William T. Hutchison, ed., *The Marcus W. Jernegan Essays in American Historiography* (Chicago, 1937), 63–4.

stitutional history should be to prepare a German audience intellectually for the impending and inevitable democratization of Germany. As a true adherent of a conservative liberalism, Sybel pointed out to Holst that a process of radicalization would endanger democracy and that a thorough study of the "American example" could indeed have "practical significance" for Germany.[16] Although it was not explicitly stated in this letter, Sybel, as a fervent supporter of German national unity, looked at the American example as proof of the superiority of the concept of national unity, which was finally achieved in the United States through Northern success in the American Civil War. As we will see, Holst shared this unitarian view and made it one of the central theses of his *magnum opus* on the U.S. Constitution.

Holst also endorsed Sybel's dislike for radical democracy, since he was a firm believer in the societal relevance of an educated *Bürgertum,* which, according to Holst, should play a leading role in a democratic society. Holst's political engagement, situated within the broader context of a traditional and moderate liberalism, was motivated by his genuine belief – and that of liberals in general – that *Bildung* was a panacea for political participation and emancipation. Increased education raises the moral tone of society and hence leads to an enlightened progress intertwined with freedom.[17] Without doubt, Holst's dislike of all oppressive political as well as religious systems stemmed from his own experience with Russia's stern rule over the Baltic German Lutheran population in Livonia. Consequently, in his historical writings, this attitude led Holst to concentrate on issues in which he could reflect on the negative consequences and negative moral implications of undemocratic and despotic regimes such as French absolutism, czarist Russia, the American Southern slaveholding society, and Catholicism in general.[18]

In 1872 Holst received a call to become an associate professor at the newly revived University of Strasbourg, named after the German annexation of Alsace "Kaiser-Wilhelm-University."[19] Thus Holst became the first and only incumbent of the first European associate professorship in U.S.

16. Sybel to Holst, July 4, 1869, Box 12, Holst MSS.
17. See James J. Sheehan, *German Liberalism in the Nineteenth Century* (Chicago, 1978), 14–15.
18. Zmarzlik, "Holst," 28–30.
19. On the University of Strasbourg, see John E. Craig, "A Mission for German Learning: The University of Strasbourg and Alsatian Society, 1870–1918" (Ph.D. Diss., Stanford University, 1973). Although Schurz greeted Holst to his position, he nevertheless regretted the loss of a politically active compatriot, as he indicated in a letter to Holst: "[W]e do not have exactly here an abundance of men who can analyze the events and know how to influence them." Schurz to Holst, February 1, 1872, box 12, Holst MSS. Translated by the author.

history – nine years earlier than the first American chair for American history was filled by Moses Coit Tyler.[20] Again Kapp, who had been the actual instigator for the American history professorship in Strasbourg, was the main actor behind the scenes to make this position available to Holst.[21] In several letters he recommended Holst to the liberal Franz von Roggenbach, former minister of Baden, who had been assigned by Bismarck to build up this university and to make it a model for German universities. Friedrich Althoff, later main organizer of the Prussian and German University system and promoter of *Wissenschaftspolitik*,[22] was one of the principal organizers of the University of Strasbourg, with a strong emphasis on graduate studies and *Seminare*.[23] Without doubt, Holst must have been influenced by this new direction of academic training. In 1874, one year after the first appearance in German of the first volume of the *Constitutional History*,[24] Holst became a full professor of modern history at the University of Freiburg, again through Kapp's mediation.[25]

For the next eighteen years, Freiburg became his sphere of effective influence, continually gaining him a reputation in scholarly as well political terms. For eight years he served as a member of the upper chamber of the Baden legislature, first by nomination of the Grand Duke, whose oldest son he had tutored, and later as a representative of the University of Freiburg in that body.[26] However, as an opponent of ultramontanism who supported Bismarck's anti-Catholic *Kulturkampf*,[27] his liberal vision forced him to op-

20. On Tyler, see Michael Kammen, *Selvages and Biases. The Fabric of History in American Culture*, 2nd ed. (Ithaca, NY, 1987), 222–53. The significance of Holst's work for American historians at that time is demonstrated by the fact that when Tyler prepared himself for his Cornell assignment, one of the historians he studied thoroughly was Holst; see Kammen, *Selvages and Biases*, 232.
21. See Roggenbach to Kapp, February 2, 1872 (copied letter in Kapp's letter to Holst), box 12, Holst MSS. When Bismarck insisted that George Bancroft be consulted regarding the filling of the professorship, Kapp also won approval from Bancroft; see Zmarzlik, "Holst," 38.
22. On Friedrich Althoff, see Bernhard vom Brocke, "Hochschul-und Wissenschaftspolitik in Preussen und im Deutschen Kaiserreich 1882–1907: Das 'System Althoff'," in Peter Baumgart, ed., *Bildungspolitik in Preussen zur Zeit des Kaiserreiches* (Stuttgart, 1980), 9–118.
23. See Brocke, "Das System Althoff," 49.
24. The complete German title was *Verfassung und Demokratie der Vereinigten Staaten von Amerika, 1. Teil: Staatssouveränität und Sklaverei* (Dusseldorf, 1873). The subsequent four volumes were entitled *Verfassungsgeschichte der Vereinigten Staaten seit der Administration Jacksons: Von der Administration Jacksons bis zur Annexion von Texas* (1878), *Von der Annexion Texas bis zum Kompromiss von 1850* (1881), *Vom Kompromiss von 1850 bis zur Wahl Buchanans* (1884), and *Von der Inauguration Buchanans bis zur Zerreissung der Union* (1891). The title of the American edition was *Constitutional and Political History of the United States*, 8 vols. (Chicago, 1876–92).
25. See Wehler, *Friedrich Kapp*, 151, fn. 69.
26. See Albert Bushnell Hart, "Hermann von Holst," *Political Science Quarterly* 5 (1890):678; Wilson, "Holst," 65–6; Goldman, "Plumed Knight," 514. Holst became *Hofrat* in 1879 and *Geheimrat* 1889.
27. For the *Kulturkampf* in Baden, see Josef Becker, *Liberaler Staat und Kirche in der Ära von Reichsgründung und Kulturkampf. Geschichte und Strukturen ihres Verhältnisses in Baden, 1860–1876* (Mainz, 1973).

pose the Iron Chancellor's drastic domestic measures, which for Holst violated basic civil rights. Despite this criticism of Bismarck, Holst gave national unity priority over internal improvement. This was demonstrated when he ran for a seat in the Imperial Diet (*Reichstag*) in the election of 1890 as a candidate of the increasingly conservative National Liberal Party. He was defeated when the Social Democrats supported his Center Party competitor in a runoff election.[28]

His dedicated political involvement, however, did not lessen his scholarly achievements. Holst contributed an extraordinary share to the development and rapid growth of the University of Freiburg, which at Holst's arrival had an enrollment of only 286 students. Holst dedicated his research almost exclusively to American subjects, even when he was teaching German and European history in Freiburg, attracting both German and American students.[29] For one of his American students, Albert Bushnell Hart, Holst became doctoral adviser for a thesis entitled "History of the Coercive Powers of the Government of the United States." Hart returned to the United States in 1883 and later taught history at Harvard. He became president of the American Historical Association in 1909[30] and edited the twenty-six-volume *American Nation Series,* published between 1904 and 1907, which, according to John Higham, "constituted the first great professional synthesis of American history."[31] Like other historians of his time who had studied in Germany, such as Herbert Baxter Adams,[32] John W. Burgess,[33] and Andrew D. White,[34] Hart became an adherent of the Teutonic hypothesis that traced the American democratic institutions back to their Teutonic origins. According to this conservative evolutionary theory, these institutions were

28. Hart, "Holst," 679; Zmarzlik, "Holst," 59.
29. Goldman, "Plumed Knight," 513–14.
30. Zmarzlik, "Holst," 41, fn. 54. For Hart, see Carol F. Baird, "Albert Bushnell Hart: The Rise of the Professional Historian," in Paul Buck, ed., *Social Sciences at Harvard, 1860–1920* (Cambridge, Mass., 1965), 129–74; Michael Whelan, "Albert Bushnell Hart and History Education, 1854–1907" (Ph.D. Diss., Columbia University, Teachers College, 1989).
31. John Higham, *History: Professional Scholarship in America* (Baltimore, 1983), 20.
32. Adams was a student of Johann Bluntschi at the University of Heidelberg, where he received his Ph.D. in 1876; on the influence of German historical scholarship on Adams, see Raymond J. Cunningham, "The German Historical World of Herbert Baxter Adams: 1874–1876," *Journal of American History* 68 (1981):261–75.
33. On Burgess, see Bernhard E. Brown, *American Conservatives: The Political Thought of Francis Lieber and John W. Burgess* (New York, 1951); Hans-Ulrich Wehler, "Nachwort zu 'Uncle Sam' von John W. Burgess," *Jahrbuch für Amerikastudien* 8 (1963):261–6. See also John W. Burgess, *Reminiscences of an American Scholar* (New York, 1934).
34. On White, see, most recently, Wolfgang Drechsler, *Andrew D. White in Deutschland. Der Vertreter der USA in Berlin 1879–1881 und 1897–1902* (Stuttgart, 1989); Glen C. Altschuler's study, *Andrew D. White – Educator, Historian, Diplomat* (Ithaca, N.Y., 1979) still provides more information on White's notion of German historiography.

then transplanted to England, from where they were transferred to New England with the first settlers.[35]

From 1878 to 1879, during a leave of absence in the United States, Holst did research for his work on constitutional history through a generous grant from the Prussian Academy of Sciences. During this stay, Holst was invited to lecture at several universities, including Johns Hopkins, Harvard, and Cornell. Daniel Coit Gilman, the noted president of Johns Hopkins University and admirer of German historical scholarship, tried to persuade Holst several times between 1879 and 1880 to join the history faculty. Holst would then have become a colleague of Herbert Baxter Adams and Austin Scott, at that time the only two regular faculty members of the Johns Hopkins history department. Holst was flattered by the offers, which he seriously considered, but finally decided to decline, largely because of the superior German pension benefits.[36]

What, then, did finally motivate Holst to leave his amazingly scholarly productive and politically influential position in Freiburg[37] more than ten years later? Although not explicitly evident in his letters, certain "push" and "pull" factors can be delineated. One of the push factors was that Holst's sphere of influence in Freiburg became too parochial for him. Limited resources in Freiburg concerning American history, as well as higher academic and political aspirations, caused Holst to aim at Imperial Germany's capital, Berlin. When the creation of a chair for American history in Berlin did not materialize,[38] and when Holst was defeated in the election of 1890, as we have already learned, the road to greater influence and prestige was blocked and the way to the University of Chicago was open. As a pull factor, the more than fivefold increase in income offered to him for this

35. On the Teutonic hypothesis, see Higham, *History*, 161; Jurgen Herbst, *The German Historical School in American Scholarship: A Study in the Transfer of Culture* (Ithaca, N.Y., 1965), 115–21; Herbert Baxter Adams, "Germanic Origins of New England Towns," *The Johns Hopkins University Studies in Historical and Political Science* (Baltimore, 1883), I:5–38.

36. At this time, Sybel asked Holst not to accept the Johns Hopkins offer: "Mr. von Sybel urged me with great energy to decline, for to gain a somewhat broader and more solid foundation for my work on the United States would not be a sufficient reason to deprive my own country of my services, where they are appreciated and bid fair to be appreciated still more in the course of time," Holst to Gilman, July 11, 1880, cited in Goldman, "Importing a Historian," 270. The correspondence between Gilman and Holst is quoted in this article. Clark University also offered Holst a position as a history professor.

37. During his tenure at the University of Freiburg, Holst produced an impressive body of scholarly works. Besides the additional four volumes of his *magnum opus* on the American Constitution, he published numerous articles in the *Historische Zeitschrift, Preussische Jahrbücher,* and two more popularly oriented books for an American audience, *John C. Calhoun* (Boston, 1882) and *John Brown* (Boston, 1889).

38. Holst's friend in Berlin, the art historian Hermann Grimm, had unsuccessfully lobbied for the creation of an American history professorship. Althoff, whom he contacted, declined for financial reasons; see Zmarzlik, "Holst," 55.

position in Chicago might have been a not insignificant factor in his decision to leave Freiburg. Another factor that might have caused Holst's move was the new mode of historiography in Germany, often defined as the Ranke renaissance.[39] Political historians such as Holst were in decline. The new generation of historians emphasized "objectivity" and abstention from overt political and moral judgment in their historical writing. Highly specialized studies replaced the more general historical works such as those written by Holst. The same trend toward specialized studies was apparent in the United States in the last decade of the nineteenth century.

III

Let us now turn to the reception of Holst's work in the United States, which reflects the permutations in historical scholarship in that country between 1876 – the year of the first appearance of the eight-volume American edition of the *Verfassungsgeschichte,* entitled *Constitutional and Political History of the United States* – and 1892, when the last translated volume of Holst's *magnum opus* appeared. Although Holst produced much more than his *magnum opus* in his long scholarly career, his *Constitutional History* had the most lasting effect on historical writing in the United States. Immediately after the appearance of the first translated volume of the *Constitutional History* in 1876, it was celebrated as the most important work on the subject, and Holst was welcomed as one of the most brilliant historians.[40] In a letter to Holst, Herbert B. Adams congratulated him for his work, which for Adams was "very generally recognized among American scholars as the most critical and, at the same time, as the most impartial and thoroughly scientific treatment to which the constitutional and political history of the United States has hitherto been subjected."[41] In the first issue of the *Political Science Quarterly,* John W. Burgess praised the *Constitutional History* as an entirely innovative work and a "new contribution to the literature of our public jurisprudence."[42] And indeed, it was one of the few general histories that covered in such a scholarly fashion the time from the writing of the

39. Here I disagree with Zmarzlik, who assumes that Holst was not affected by these changes; see Zmarzlik, "Holst," 43. On the Ranke renaissance, see Hans-Heinz Krill, *Die Rankerenaissance, Max Lenz und Erich Marcks* (Berlin, 1962); Elisabeth Fehrenbach, "Rankerenaissance und Imperialismus in der wihlhelminischen Zeit," in Bernd Faulenbach, ed., *Geschichtswissenschaft in Deutschland* (Munich, 1974), 54–65.

40. For the positive reviews, see Charles K. Adams, *A Manual of Historical Literature* (New York, 1889), 607; Henry Adams and Henry C. Lodge, *North American Review* 123 (1876):328–61.

41. Adams to Holst, December 6, 1878, cited in Goldman, "Plumed Knight," 519–20.

42. John W. Burgess, "Von Holst's Public Law of the United States," *Political Science Quarterly* 1 (1886): 615.

Constitution to the Civil War. Also, when compared with the historical work produced by Americans at this time, Holst's approach was far more professional than those of the mostly self-taught American historians such as Tyler, John Bach McMaster, and Edward Eggleston.[43] The books written by James Schouler and James F. Rhodes lacked Holst's more sophisticated research. In addition to these factors, the timing could not have been better: The image of German professional historical scholarship had reached its zenith, and the aura of a German historian almost guaranteed success. In fact, American historians might have been flattered by the fact that a German historian deemed it worthwhile to deal with an American subject.[44] The translators even went so far as to compare the possible interest the work might create with that of Tocqueville's *Democracy in America*.[45]

Sixteen years later, however, the appearance of Holst's last volume of the *Constitutional History* evoked more criticism than praise.[46] Ironically, it was in the same year that Holst accepted a call from the University of Chicago. What was the reason for this decline of acceptance of Holst's work and the increasing criticism by contemporary American historians? We can take Holst's case as an example of how the ideal of German historiography and its perception of how a historian should approach his subject was slowly being replaced by an increasingly German-critical community of historians in the United States, or what Jurgen Herbst once called "the rise and decline of the German historical school . . . in the United States . . . between 1876 . . . and 1914."[47] We have to be aware of the underlying forces of the general American historiographical climate that shaped this critique. The growing criticism of Holst's work also indicated a move away from the New England–dominated school of historians – who were strongly influenced by German historiography – to a more self reliant, self-conscious, genuinely American school of historiography, coinciding with a strong American nationalism that called for self-definition. Frederick Jackson Turner, interestingly enough a student of H. B. Adams, exemplified that tendency, which gave high priority to social history and thus superseded political history as the primary field of research. This new trend in American historiography also indicated the failure of the attempt by German-trained American historians, like H. B. Adams, to transplant German historical thinking to the United States. In other words, they failed to accomplish a

43. See Kammen, *Selvages and Biases*, 236.
44. Goldman, "Plumed Knight," 512.
45. *Constitutional History* I, translator's note, xiv.
46. Goldman, "Plumed Knight," 511. For a discussion of Holst's view on Jacksonian democracy, see Alfred A. Cave, *Jacksonian Democracy and the Historians* (Westport, Conn., 1964), 14–16.
47. Herbst, *The German Historical School*, viii.

synthesis between their German notion of history – basically a concept of *Ideengeschichte* – with American historical material.[48] But it was precisely through the concept of *Ideengeschichte* that Holst, who wrote history out of contemporary political interests, tried to manifest the moral dimension of history and human actions involved in the process.

Thus in the early 1890s, Holst was criticized by a growing number of American historians primarily for his philosophical notion of history as purposive and instrumental. Without doubt, this perception and preconception led him to a narrowed interpretation of American history as a fight between the forces of good and evil, with the South, as the proponent of slavery and thus evil, inevitably losing to the good cause of the Union.[49] As a firm believer in centralization and an opponent of states' rights, Holst celebrated the outcome of the Civil War as proof of the superior concept of unitarism. Since the *Constitutional History* was written under the fresh impression of the unification of the German Reich, it amplified Holst's beliefs in this direction. There are abundant references to the *Zeitgeist,* or mind and spirit, in Holst's *magnum opus,* the constructive relationship between a "national sentiment" and the identity of the individual.[50] As an exponent of a moderate liberalism, for Holst the *Rechtsstaat* – imperfect as it may be – was the cornerstone of civilization. This rather optimistic and positive notion of the state was not shared by American liberals, who assessed more realistically the potential conflict between state and individual.[51]

Interestingly enough, extrinsically the major criticism of Holst's work grew out of skepticism about German historians in general, who were identified with the interests of the autocratic German-Prussian state.[52] Holst's allegedly wrong interpretation of American institutions was viewed as a lack of experience with "free institutions" in the United States, since "these things are mysteries to German professors, because they are mysteries to German statesmen also. The German scholar simply reads in a book of things which we are always looking at and acting in."[53] In the same vein,

48. Ibid., 128.
49. Although Gilman's endeavor to recruit Holst as a history professor was approved, a response by a member of the executive committee of the board of trustees of Johns Hopkins University is revealing in regard to the assessment of Holst as a historian: "[H]is [Holst's] views on the Slavery Question . . . seemed to me to be extreme altho' natural from his point of view. He judges of what was done in forming the Constitution, and in the strife of parties since, not according to the opinions then generally entertained, or with sufficient allowance for the difficulties of the case . . . but rather as an abstract question of right considered in the light of today." Cited in Goldman, "Importing a Historian," 268.
50. Goldman, "Plumed Knight," 526.
51. See Iggers, *The German Conception of History,* 94–5; Sheehan, *German Liberalism,* 234.
52. Sheehan, *German Liberalism,* 234.
53. John Alexander Jameson, *A Treatise on Constitutional Conventions,* 4th ed. (Chicago, 1887), 658. For

Harry P. Judson, dean and later Harper's successor as president of the University of Chicago, expressed his concern on Holst's appointment – not in regard to his personal qualifications but as a potential representative of the German Reich: "Of course there was a time when German notions were a valuable leaven in America – German enthusiasm for pure knowledge and careful specialization. But I think that that day has about gone. We have learned the German lesson – quite too thoroughly. . . . I should be hopelessly out of accord with a fragment of the German empire transplanted to Chicago."[54]

This remark is revealing indeed and reflects the growing tendency to identify German scholarship with authoritarianism and antidemocratic, hierarchical structures. As Frank Trommler has recently pointed out, it reflected less the actual level of scholarship in Germany than the rising competition in this field between the two countries.[55] But it also anticipated a growing reservation and skepticism about the German (Prussian) state and everything attached to it, such as culture and education. It also should be mentioned that in the context of the 1890s, there existed a nativist and antihyphen mentality in parts of American society, caused by new waves of immigration accompanied by a growing general skepticism about imported foreign ideas and culture.[56] In fact, the attraction of studying in Germany had declined perceptibly in the 1890s, which was reflected by the decreasing number of American students then enrolled at German universities.[57] Already in 1886, H. B. Adams, the strongest advocate of German historical scholarship,[58] compared with pride the best of the American universities with German universities and stated that it was not longer the *sine qua non* for American history students to attend German universities for training in European and American history.[59] It is interesting to note that Adams also gradually changed his positive perception of the German historical profession and oriented himself with the English "democratic" historians.[60]

a very similar view, see also W. L. Penfield's review of volumes 4 and 5 of the *Constitutional History* in *American Law Review* 20 (1886):123–4.

54. Judson to Harper, December 25, 1891, cited in Richard Storr, *Harper's University: The Beginnings. A History of the University of Chicago* (Chicago, 1966), 159.
55. See Frank Trommler, "Years of Estrangement: German–American Cultural Relations, 1900–1917," paper given at the Third Krefeld German–American Symposium, 1990, 9–10.
56. See Alfred Vagts, *Deutschland und die Vereinigten Staaten in der Weltpolitik*, 2 vols. (New York, 1935), I:435. Vagts misinterprets Holst's call from the University of Chicago as a consciously antinativist decision.
57. See Barnes, "German Influence on American Historical Studies," 68; Higham, *History*, 19.
58. John Higham states that Adams "did more than anyone else to Germanize American historical scholarship." Higham, *History*, 11.
59. See H. B. Adams, *The Study of History in American Colleges and Universities* (Washington, D.C., 1887), 41.
60. See Herbst, *The German Historical School*, 127.

Besides the fact that in the early 1890s major American historians emerged and their publications coincided with the last volume of Holst's *Constitutional History,*[61] these intrinsic and extrinsic factors led to a critical reception of Holst's work. As Michael Kammen has pointed out, "historians have not been very successful in handling the problem posed by interpretations considered ideologically unpopular at any given moment," and he rightly quotes Holst as an example for the late nineteenth century.[62]

IV

Ten years before Holst arrived at the University of Chicago, most American colleges did not have trained history faculty, and for a long time the colleges were structured more like schools. For universities such as Chicago, this meant that in order to elevate their prestige, it was necessary to educate students for both independent research and the teaching of history.[63] Along with the general transformation of higher learning in the United States,[64] starting in the 1870s there was a notable increase in the number of history courses offered at American institutions of higher education. Whereas history was taught before that time – if at all – by classics or philosophy professors, it was now increasingly taken over by trained historians. The need for an education of professional historians, who were capable of teaching history, stimulated the growth of and necessitated the emphasis on graduate studies. American colleges had to adapt to this new trend, and reforms were aimed at incorporating graduate training that was largely molded on the features of the German university, with a major emphasis on scholarly research.[65] With the opening of Johns Hopkins University in 1876 and the emphasis on research, historical studies were professionalized in the 1880s and 1890s under the able direction of H. B. Adams. Consequently, this school awarded the first American Ph.D. in history six years later to J. Franklin Jameson, the *paterfamilias* of the historical profession in the United States.[66] But it was a mere beginning. In 1884, the year of the founding of the American Historical Association, there were only twenty regular professors of history in the nearly 400 American colleges and universities in the

61. See Goldmann, "Plumed Knight," 516.
62. Michael Kammen, *Selvages and Biases,* 89.
63. Zmarzlik, "Holst," 63.
64. See Donald W. Light, "The Development of Professional Schools in America," in Konrad Jarausch, ed., *The Transformation of Higher Learning 1860–1930* (Stuttgart, 1983), 345–65.
65. Barnes, "German Influence on American Historical Studies," 51.
66. For a conflicting view of when the first American Ph.D. in history was awarded, see Bonnie B. Collier and Christopher Collier, "Who's on First?" *Perspectives* 27 (December 1989):10–11.

United States. Others had to divide their teaching duties with other disciplines, such as political science.[67]

By the time Holst arrived at the University of Chicago, American historical studies were thus indeed on their way to becoming more professional. Increased professionalization had an effect on the expansion of history courses offered in college curricula and led to the expansion of graduate studies. In these formative years of the American historical profession, newly established monographic series such as the *Johns Hopkins University Studies in Historical and Political Science,* edited by H. B. Adams, and journals contributed to the rapid growth of the scholarly interest in history. Although the major emphasis was on American history, these efforts were still oriented to German scholarship.[68] When Holst received the call from the University of Chicago, it was this aura of German *Wissenschaft* that stimulated the interest in promoting graduate studies.

Although Holst's historical methodology was in decline, his personal reputation as a historian, scholar, and educator, especially amplified by the German scholarly aura, was beyond criticism. William Rainey Harper, first president of the University of Chicago, was indeed proud when he finally managed to recruit Holst to become "head professor" – this term was later changed to "department chair" – of the history department and, in this position, to build up the department.

As a tenured head professor – the most influential academic position – Holst supervised the department in its entirety, including coordination of the curriculum, preparation of entrance examination papers, and the hiring of new faculty members in consultation with the president. Shortly after Holst's arrival in Chicago, the history department consisted of three professors and two instructors, all five Americans. Looking at the overall number of Ph.D.s held by the university's faculty members, it is worthwhile to note that fourteen of the thirty-five held a German Ph.D. Of the thirteen head professors, five held a Ph.D., of which two were German.[69]

In his negotiations with Harper before he accepted the call from Chicago, Holst had requested full freedom for teaching and learning, *Lern-und Lehrfreiheit,* "which we Germans consider the condition *sine qua non* of a real university," as Holst expressed it in a letter to Harper. He also emphasized that he intended to build up the history department on the model of German universities. Holst opted for improvement of the education of graduate students by insisting that they be taught by historians who were

67. See Higham, *History,* 4. In 1880 there were eleven professors of history in the United States; see Kammen, *Selvages and Biases,* 235.
68. Barnes, "German Influence on American Historical Studies," 129.
69. Starr, *Harper's University,* 62, 76; Zmarzlik, "Holst," 59, fn. 89.

capable of independent research.[70] Harper agreed since the university was organized to emphasize graduate work and original research. In addition, one of the important functions of the university was the preparation of students for teaching positions through its graduate departments and professional schools.[71]

But still, there were conflicts between Harper and Holst about the nature of the university. Should scholarship – as Holst wanted it – become the first priority of the university, or service – as was Harper's position? After his first glance at the university's schedule of activities, Holst complained that too many lectures were offered and too much of the academic planning was tailored to the needs of students. According to Holst, quality, not quantity, should be the priority. The individual faculty members should themselves decide what they wanted to teach. According to Holst, this decision should not be subordinated to a set curriculum. The intellectual elite could only be encouraged through high-quality research and should not be influenced by "the masses who require to be guided in such matters."[72] At monthly meetings with Harper and the university senate – consisting of the thirteen head professors, a recorder, and the librarian – Holst endeavored to convince them that this was the right approach. How well he succeeded in implementing his ideas is hard to assess in retrospect, but his correspondence demonstrates how often he had to struggle and his insistence on the principles he had acquired and defended at German universities.[73] Holst's importance to the new university was shown when he delivered the keynote speech at the opening ceremony on January 2, 1893, on "The Need of Universities in the United States."[74]

In every respect, Holst was interested in transferring his ideas about the university, shaped by his German experience, to this newly developing university of the Midwest. *Akademische Freiheit* and research were the first priorities, and the second was the improvement of standards in education in order to elevate the prestige of the university. Holst repeatedly requested that, at a minimum, doctoral candidates should not be allowed to repeat their exam more than twice.[75] "The candidate for the doctor's degree in History will be expected to pass an examination upon the entire field of

70. Zmarzlik, "Holst," 60, 74.
71. See Thomas Wakefield Goodspeed, *A History of the University of Chicago. The First Quarter-Century* (Chicago, 1916), 374–5.
72. Holst to Judson, August 26, 1892, box 12, Holst MSS.
73. Zmarzlik, "Holst," 72–4.
74. See Charles F. Thwing, *The American and the German University. One Hundred Years of History* (New York, 1928), 92; Starr, *Harper's University*, 181. The same year, the Prussian Cultural Ministry presented itself with an exhibition on German higher education at the Chicago World's Fair; see Brocke, "Das System Althoff," 65–6.
75. Zmarzlik, "Holst," 72.

history . . . the main stress falling upon the subdivisions, ancient, medieval or modern."[76]

Beyond Chicago, Holst was engaged in the reform of the entire American university system. For example, he gave a lecture at Nebraska State University on "Nationalization of Education and the Universities,"[77] in which he emphasized close cooperation among the greater American universities, with the goal of setting standards nationwide for student registration and academic degrees. He emphasized that the universities, not the colleges and high schools, should dictate the level of education, and that education should be nationalized without being consolidated.[78] The founding in 1900 of the Association of American Universities, which was created by the presidents of Harvard, Columbia, Johns Hopkins, and the universities of California and Chicago, shows that Holst was not alone in his efforts to coordinate different universities.

Without doubt Holst was a successful teacher, as demonstrated by overcrowded classrooms and overwhelming applause after his lectures.[79] Each semester he offered a four-hour lecture and a seminar on American history subjects. In the "kollegs" he discussed subjects relating to the French Revolution and nineteenth-century history.[80] Holst did not want to train specialists in American history, but rather "to contend against this narrow and humiliating notion. . . .Still, if we want to be a real University worthy of a great nation we must train historians and not merely drill specialists for a very limited field, which itself can be properly understood only if one rises to the conception of his being but one integral part of one vast organic whole."[81]

However, when Holst spoke of the status of American history specialists in Germany, he perceived the situation differently. In an astonishingly contemporary-sounding comment, he complained that the study of American history was still not adequately accepted and acknowledged by German historians who were "stars of the first order" in a field sufficiently serious for exclusive concentration.[82]

Through his political involvement in Germany as well as in the United States, Holst embodied the German idea of "the professor as the conscience

76. Starr, *Harper's University,* 155.
77. *The Monist* 3 (1893):493–509.
78. Ibid., 506–7.
79. For Holst's successful teaching skills, see Lucie Hammond, a former student of Holst, "Hermann von Holst, the Historian," *American Monthly Review of Reviews* 29 (1904):322.
80. Zmarzlik, "Holst," 72.
81. Holst to Harper, August 3, 1890, Harper MSS, cited in Zmarzlik, "Holst," 75.
82. Holst to Gilman, April 14, 1883, cited in Goldman, "Importing a Historian," 273.

of the state" and thus active in civic affairs, an idea that "corresponded roughly to the American ideal of an aristocracy of culture. John W. Burgess, German-trained historian who inaugurated graduate work in history and political science at Columbia, hoped to produce statesmen and public officials, as well as scholars."[83] Holst lived out these principles through his active involvement in the protest against American imperialism, the Venezuela policy of President Cleveland, and the annexation of Hawaii under President McKinley in 1898,[84] the same year Harper decided to grant an honorary doctoral degree to this very president. A year later, due to his deteriorating health, Holst resigned from his professorship and returned to Germany, where he died in 1904.

Holst's position as a tenured head professor and as the founder of the history department had been a success in every respect. The University Senate Address to Holst of December 10, 1900, read in part: "You have been conspicuous for scholarship and the maintenance of scholarly ideals; in the work of laying the foundations of a new American university your preeminent conscientiousness and strenuous devotion to the highest educational aims have been appreciated and admired. . . .Your reputation . . . has been one of the foremost elements of our success. . . ."

V

In the story of the transfer of historical thinking and ideals of higher education from Germany in the last quarter of the nineteenth century, Holst is one of the rare examples in which this transfer was instigated by a German scholar and not by Americans returning from their studies in Germany. It is worth noting that this historian was not a Europeanist, but primarily a specialist in American history. To our knowledge, Holst was the only German historian who received a call from an American university in the last quarter of the nineteenth century despite widespread admiration for the German school of historians. Therefore, one wonders why more German historians were not imported. A partial explanation might be the general relationship between the ordinate and the subordinate. The gradient between German and American historiography was so intense that American historians might have been intimidated by major important representatives of the German historical profession. Wilhelm von Humboldt's discouraging comment to George Bancroft concerning the importing of German scholars

83. Higham, *History*, 11.

84. See Charles Francis Adams and Schurz to Holst, January 30, 1899, box 13, Holst MSS; see also Goldman, "Plumed Knight," 515.

– "The proposition of importing German learned men into America is not a good one. The eminent men, those of very distinguished talents, those who would be able to do good, would never be induced to quit their country"[85] – is contradicted by Holst's successful tenure at the University of Chicago. Although Holst does not belong to the top-ranking historians of the nineteenth century, his importance as a mediator between two historiographical and educational worlds is great. His effect and influence, however, might have been greater in a time before the United States entered what we would call a transitional period in which American universities liberated themselves from European, especially German, academic predominance. Holst might then have become a true pioneer of German historical scholarship, as Hermann von Sybel had predicted.

85. Cited in O. W. Long, *Literary Pioneers: Early American Explorers of European Culture* (Cambridge, Mass., 1935), 134.