

American Studies in Sweden

The United States has been the object of considerable Swedish interest since at least the Revolutionary War, but the institutionalized study of America is of much more recent date. There were early attempts to introduce American Studies at Uppsala university in the 1940s, and the U. S. Government sponsored guest lecturers from Harvard, Yale, Cornell, and other American universities who stayed for a term at Swedish universities. The first American lecturers were employed at the universities of Stockholm, Lund, Gothenburg, and Uppsala in the mid-fifties, and the first doctoral dissertations in American literature also appeared at this time. But the real beginning of the field did not take place until the early 1960s, when, through a donation from the American Council of Learned Societies, two temporary chairs in American literature and American history were established at Uppsala university. Sweden also hosted in 1961 the first conference arranged by the newly established Nordic Association for American Studies in Sigtuna.

In 1966-67 Uppsala university tried to turn the chair in American literature into a permanent one, but the Swedish government refused to accept the proposal. This resistance to a chair in American Studies was natural; this was the time of the Vietnam War and the Swedish position at that time vis-à-vis the United States is well known. However, after many turns of discussion, the government gave way and professor Olov Fryckstedt was appointed to the first permanent chair in American literature in 1968. Unfortunately, no permanent chair in American history was ever established. Since 1968, the doctoral program in American literature at Uppsala university has graduated some forty doctors of philosophy, most of whom were or are employed by Swedish universities or university colleges. Even if Uppsala university has been dominant in the field, important work has also been done in American literature at all the other Swedish universities and at a couple of university colleges.

Research in American history has prospered at the universities of Lund, Uppsala, and Växjö, and in more recent years work in other fields of study, such as political science, media studies, and film studies, has to an increasing degree been devoted to the United States. Undergraduate programs in American Studies have been offered by the Uppsala, Lund, and Växjö universities. In 1985, the Swedish Institute for North American Studies (SINAS) was established as a separate research institute at Uppsala university. Its research has been oriented towards history and social studies; it has been the center for projects concerning, for instance, political rhetoric, the American influence in Sweden, and affirmative action in the United States and Sweden. It is also offering a three-semester undergraduate program in American Studies. The Fulbright Distinguished Chair in American Studies is since 1996 located at SINAS. The Swedish Association for American Studies was established in 1997.

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