

# AMERICAN STUDIES IN SCANDINAVIA

— a new periodical

By Sune Åkerman

On the 31st of January 1959 scholars from the five Nordic countries met at the American Institute to found a society for American Studies in Scandinavia. The scholars represented six different areas within the Liberal Arts, and seven universities. A working committee was appointed to plan activities. The members of this committee were Professors Lars Ahnebrink, Sweden, Sigmund Skard, Norway, Sven Henningsen, Denmark, Ole Reuter, Finland, and Hreinn Benediktsson, Iceland. The committee was transformed into the Board of the Society with the same members and with Dr. Åhnebrink as the Chairman and Dr. Elovsson, Sweden, as Secretary and Treasurer.

The program for the NAAS was the following: The aim of the NAAS is to encourage and facilitate serious study of the United States in Scandinavia. In its promotion of American Studies the NAAS will consider scholarly research, teaching and education in schools and universities and the general cultural media of information. The NAAS will try to be of value to all those with a general interest in American culture or whose work requires a knowledge of the development and growth of American civilization. It will be particularly significant for journalists, librarians, government officials, critics, writers, teachers in secondary schools, university students, research scholars, and professors.

Up to now the activity of the NAAS has especially been concentrated on the conferences arranged every third year. At these

conferences a great number of Nordic and American experts have addressed audiences mainly consisting of representatives from the universities and secondary schools about special American conditions and problems. Each such conference has been concerned with a theme that has been illustrated by different lecturers, who speak from their extensive studies at the universities. As an example could be mentioned the conference in Helsingfors in 1967 where experts on American literature, history and sociology discussed tensions in American society.

To the present about 250 persons from all the five Nordic countries have participated in the conferences and about 40 specialists have given lectures at them. Those in the Nordic countries studying American subjects often find it difficult to get material or to obtain information on what is available. From the very beginning the NAAS has pursued a special interest in problems of documentation. An inventory has been made of Nordic libraries and archives to compile a list of microfilm material that illustrates American culture. A special bibliography committee has planned a survey of American periodicals which are available in Nordic libraries. The first part of this work on American literature with financial support from ACLS will soon be finished. The next part, compiling materials in Political Science and History, ought to be of great value to research, especially in Political Science which has, to a great extent, been influenced by American research.

American Studies has not been integrated into any Nordic university. No doubt the NAAS should try to make improvements in developing further studies, such as a so-called Area Studies program would possibly imply. However, the NAAS has not taken any position in this complex question. There is, however, within the organization a positive attitude towards the aim of integration of the kind that American Studies represents. Professor Skard has made a summary in his article in *USA in Focus*, the book in which the conference in Oslo was presented: »Today the idea of integration points to a basic weakness in modern academic teaching and research; and no similar movement in our time raises the protest against this weakness with comparable force and consistency. We are fast approaching the society of mass education, with an explosive growth of the student population even in the universities, with ever more insi-

stent practical demands, and with a corresponding tendency to reduce teaching and requirements to the quality of intellectual emergency rations. If, in this society, the American Studies movement proves able to maintain its standards of solid research, it is bound to become ever more important, even outside of its own field., The intention is that the NAAS at the next conference in Copenhagen will have American Studies organization in Scandinavia as a main theme. In this issue of the periodical Dr Håkan Berggren presents a proposal of an American Studies program in Uppsala.

An important task for the organization is to inform about American Studies research and other contacts between American public education and university system and Scandinavia. As early as 1960 the decision was made that the organization should start publishing a Newsletter. Only now these plans have come true. The original plans have been altered and what we now present is a periodical that will contain both scholarly essays and general information as in American Quarterly.

The first issue of the periodical American Studies in Scandinavia contains as the leading article a somewhat abbreviated edition of a lecture given by professor Dan Aaron, Smith College, Massachusetts at the conference in Helsingfors last summer. Its theme is quite close to the theme of this conference »Tensions in American Society». One must remember that quite a long and eventful period has passed between the lecture and the printing of it. The fairly negative judging of the New Left should probably have been modulated in some passages if professor Aaron would deal with the same subject today.

This issue of the periodical also contains a report from the Emigration Conference taking place in the summer of 1967 in Växjö with participants from the Nordic countries as well as the United States. A report on American Studies in Norway which is the country where these studies have the strongest position in Scandinavia is presented by professor Skard. Besides it contains obituaries of two prominent men who have worked to spread the interest for America in Scandinavia; Halvdan Koht, the politician and historian, and Lars Ähnebrink, literary historian and the founder and first chairman of the NAAS.