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## تدریس تاریخ آمریکا در ایران

### «TEACHING AMERICAN HISTORY IN IRAN»

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In many ways, the development of higher education in Iran is similar to developments in other countries in the region. In most of these countries formal modern universities were late in coming. In the 20th century faced with rapidly changing political and social order, the need to establish Modern Western type universities were greatly felt, to promote development and modernization. There were, of course, differences due to geography, history, national experience, and circumstances but it is true nevertheless, that they followed an almost similar pattern of growth and development.

In Iran, the first modern university was established in Tehran in the 1930's with few faculties including humanities and was expanded to over twenty faculties with over 15 thousand students in the 1960's.

The pattern of Iranian higher education was shaped by the influence of the French cultural tradition. The grouping of the various academic disciplines modeled after the French system enjoyed relative degree of autonomy with a faculty that was mainly trained in French universities.

History program included in humanities, was mainly Iranian and European history— American history was taught only in the context of European history. This limitation resulted from several factors which were somehow interrelated: first, the faculty trained in French universities emphasized teaching of European and French history. Second factor involved the prevalent attitude that America as a Young country, did not have a long historical past.

In fact, America was a country that always looked to the future rather than the past and there was a sense of an anticipated future "as an essential element of American identity." in a profession that set up itself as the Custodian of the past, and among a people with particular attitude toward that past, history of a new nation that has characteristically sought identify in the future, was not considered

very significant. American non involvement in international affairs, prior to the second world war, was also a contributing factor. As a result American cultural impact was less felt in that era.

With Iran's rapidly moving economy, and a greater cultural ties between the two countries there has been a considerable change in the academic attitude resulting in restructuring and expansion of the universities. Universities have adopted credit system after American Model, included elective courses in the curriculum and hired professors trained in American universities. The change in the curriculum has been effective in history program as well. Aside from major courses taught in Iranian and Islamic history, there are elective courses in American history taught in Tehran, Pahlavi and National University.

American history course in Tehran University is mainly a survey course to provide a general frame of references and an adequate background with particular emphasis on the forces that shaped modern America: urbanization, industrialization, immigration and how these forces affected the economic and social structure of the country with result of the emergence of America as a world power.

From my own experience, students are more receptive if methods of instruction do not emphasize Chronological memorization, but rather emphasis understanding and critical analysis. This gives the students not only a basic understanding of the culture, but also an insight into the dynamic elements that shaped modern America. This approach has been fairly successful, although there are some problems involved.

One problem is the lack of sources in American history in Persian language, research, translation and publication in the field has been limited to a few general sources. Apart from academic limitation, there are some problems in regard to students. First of all, almost all of the students who approach the subject of American History have no background about the subject. The image of America has been introduced through popular culture, films, television, music, and blue jeans. The importance of the role of university professors is to present the American history and culture in an academic fashion. Publication of various works in the field could help to overcome this limitation.

Another problem which relates to the scarcity of sources in Persian is the fact that most students do not know English language enough to be able to use English sources and materials in original language. There is also problem of attitudes prevalent among students. One such is a belief in certain myth about America as being a rich country, run by big corporation resulting in a distrust of America for what it represents in the international scene.

Considering the existing physical and academic limitation, the problem is how the courses should be designed or what methods should be utilized that could be of most benefit to the students. Use of interdisciplinary methods, a collaborative research effort and preparation of extensive reference materials in Persian language could be very beneficial in this regard. These collaborative efforts could be best utilized by creating a center for American studies as it exists in some of the countries in the region, to bring together the efforts of all professors involved in this project.

There are certain cultural and social advantages in doing so, but at the same time one may argue about the validity of compelling an Iranian student to deal with a culture different from his own. It is however, through awareness and understanding of another culture and mentality that we gain more insight and perspective into our own culture in a rapidly changing society.

We live in a technological age and can not isolate ourselves from the rest of the world. Today, the jet lines and telecommunication, atomic energy, and satellites have so reduced our world that the continents have shrunk to the size of islands. The distance that once kept men of different races and cultures apart has disappeared. The problem of education in such a situation is using technology and at the same time gaining understanding of all cultures and all people. It is important to know and learn about other countries in order to judge our own situation and find solution for our problems. As Adlai Stevenson once remarked "All men are now travellers on a space ship from which there is no space hatch".