Wartime Planning, Postwar Response: Rockefeller Foundation Contributions to Cultural Reconstruction in Post-World War II Europe

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Over the course of the 2010-2011 academic year, the generous support of a Rockefeller Archive Center (RAC) Grant-In-Aid allowed me to visit the RAC several times a month to conduct research for my dissertation, “Books across Borders: The Politics of Cultural Reconstruction in Early Postwar, Post-Holocaust, Cold War Europe.” Through a comparative analysis of efforts undertaken in France and Poland particularly, as well as to surviving Jewish groups and communities scattered throughout World War II-devastated Europe, my dissertation investigates the centrality of postwar cultural reconstruction to the mission of the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO). More specifically, I explore how national and international organizations, foundations and institutions collaborated with the newly established UNESCO in order to respond to the pressing needs of Europe’s ravaged library and book cultures. The research I conducted at the RAC allowed me to examine the nature and extent of the involvement of the Rockefeller Foundation (RF) Humanities Division in UNESCO and in postwar library and book-related reconstruction and rehabilitation projects.

UNESCO: Origins and Interest in Libraries

Established in November 1945, UNESCO was referred to in the 1946 RF Annual Report as “one of the most promising developments” of that year. 1 Throughout postwar Europe, the long
and desperately awaited collapse of Hitler’s merciless reign signified the end of the silencing, persecution, and annihilation of millions. For many, including the creators of UNESCO, the return of unfettered access to libraries, books and reading symbolized liberation from the ruthless crushing of these realms under fascism, and was felt to be an almost existential need in the wake of the mass devastation. UNESCO’s founding mission to promote toleration, universalism, and understanding through the expansion of knowledge, learning and literacy, including addressing postwar Europe’s library and book needs, arose out of the devastation wrought by the Second World War and was rendered both more difficult and more dramatically urgent as the extent of that devastation came to light. Viewed through the lens of UNESCO, the immediate postwar years represented a brief, chaotic, yet intensely hopeful interim moment before the Iron Curtain, wars of decolonization, and other international conflicts emerging in 1945 became full blown, rendering achievement of the ideals embodied by UNESCO increasingly distant and remote.

Today, UNESCO’s development efforts and preservation policies are fairly well-known thanks to the global reach of prominent programs such as UNESCO World Heritage Sites and UNESCO Goodwill Ambassadors. It has largely been forgotten, however, that during the years immediately following World War II, reconstruction and rehabilitation in Europe were of equal, if not even greater concern to the nascent UNESCO. Cultural reconstruction in particular was a core aim of those concerned with reinstating freedom and toleration to war-ravaged Europe. As libraries, to varying degrees, guide the reading and shape the memory of individuals and communities, the books they do or do not hold contribute to forming local, national and specialized knowledge, ideas and interests. Highlighting this role helps explain why UNESCO and other postwar cultural reconstruction bodies assigned such significance to libraries, books and reading. An internal report described RF concern in this realm as follows. “With advance
difficult in almost every field of the RF’s interest until books and periodicals are available, the RF is perhaps as directly concerned with restocking of libraries in war areas as any agency in the United States.”

**History: RF and Libraries**

In a 2003 special issue of the journal *Minerva* focusing on “American Foundations in Europe,” historian William Buxton discusses the often-unacknowledged work in the humanities, including with libraries, that the RF’s Assistant Director John Marshall accomplished in Europe during the 1930s. My research reveals that as Associate Director of the Division of Humanities beginning in 1940, Marshall’s work in this realm continued through the war years and beyond, encouraged and inspired by the Director of the Division, David H. Stevens. Indeed on the cover of his “Review of Humanities Program 1939-1941,” Stevens himself handwrote, “international work in libraries stressed,” clearly emphasizing the continuation of libraries as a RF Humanities priority into the 1940s. Reaffirming that continuity at the war’s end, Marshall declared in his officer’s diary entry of October 4, 1945 that “The supply of printed materials to European libraries is so essential to further progress in every field of the Foundation’s interest as to constitute a primary concern for the Foundation.” Further evidence of RF commitment to libraries and librarianship is visible in RF appropriations records. In the ten to fifteen years following their first appearance in the late 1920s, library projects came to account for a significant share of total RF funding each year. Between 1939 and 1945, for example, Libraries and Museums as a category received twenty percent, the highest proportion by between two and ten percent, of total RF Humanities appropriations.

Since its founding, UNESCO has relied on an extensive network of national and international, governmental, non-governmental and private organizations to help formulate, fund
and implement its mission and goals. The American Library Association (ALA) and the International Federation of Library Associations (IFLA) have particular significance to this research, and both had a history of RF support that predated the outbreak of World War II. Through the rich holdings of the RAC, I have been able to trace the roots and evolution of these interconnections, which help document RF interest in and support for the realm of libraries and international library work in general, and in relation to UNESCO specifically.

The story begins during World War I, when the ALA turned to the RF seeking support for its Million Dollar Campaign to provide books and libraries to American soldiers and prisoners of war. After initially deeming the campaign as outside of its scope, the RF soon became convinced of the vital necessity of ensuring that American military personnel had access to reading and learning material. A $25,000 RF grant to the ALA approved in August 1917 was the first of many RF appropriations to the ALA, and represents the basis of what proved to be an enduring and highly productive relationship between the two organizations and their representative officials.\(^8\)

During the interwar years, the RF began exploring ways in which it could become more involved in “international co-operation and organization.”\(^9\) To that end, in 1927 John D. Rockefeller, Jr. pledged $2,000,000 to build a new library for the League of Nations at its headquarters in Geneva. The RF’s Abraham Flexner imagined it as “a library which might well come to be the best equipped, the best supplied, and the most readily usable in its field in the entire world.”\(^10\) With America’s interwar isolationist stance prevailing at the time, political implications were as important as practical considerations in the decision to build the library. The United States was not a member nation of the League, yet the U.S. State Department supported Rockefeller’s endeavor, stating that “for an American to put up a Library would be
one more bit of evidence that America is not opposed to the League as an agency for peace but wishes it the utmost possible success.”¹¹ As such, Rockefeller and his library project became a symbolic affirmation that American concern for and commitment to international affairs and cooperation did in fact exist during this tense period. In addition, the relationships RF officials developed during the establishment of the Library remained key going into the postwar years. Not only is UNESCO viewed as an outgrowth or extension of the League of Nations’ interwar International Committee of Intellectual Cooperation, but many of the same individuals and organizations went on to become closely involved with UNESCO and its cultural reconstruction and library activities.

The next major step in this chronological progression occurred in May 1929, the year that the RF officially expanded its work into the humanities.¹² In response to the increasingly pressing preservation and organizational needs of the Bodleian Library at Oxford, the new Humanities Division drafted the RF’s first specific policy towards libraries: “the officers are at this time recommending to the Trustees the advancement of knowledge through aid to libraries.”¹³ The evolution of the RF’s impetus to support the advancement of knowledge, including at first through limited assistance to “outstanding libraries” such as the Bodleian, took on a new urgency and a greatly expanded reach with the onset of World War II.¹⁴

**World War II: Wartime Planning**

As early as 1941, with Hitler still at the peak of his power, RF officials joined in on discussions about postwar “European Reorganization and Reconstruction” with various American and English governmental representatives and non-governmental organizations.¹⁵ Even more revelatory regarding RF concerns and interests in this realm is an internal November 1942 dialogue among RF officials regarding a question asked by RF Social Sciences Director
Joseph H. Willits, “What is the RF obligation re the reconstruction of...education in Europe?” Willits worried that with the American government necessarily consumed with the war effort, it might fall to the RF to create a commission to begin planning for postwar reconstruction needs, plans that could be transferred to a government body once the war ended and the State Department was free to turn its attention to reconstruction. In his response to Willits, Assistant Director Roger F. Evans agreed on the need for such a body, stating that postwar reconstruction constituted “a major problem bound to come to RF in time, so we certainly would do well to develop our own thoughts first and independently.” Regarding postwar library rehabilitation specifically, the RF developed its thinking primarily in conjunction with the International Relations Board of the ALA, with Marshall the only non-governmental and non-librarian representative on the ALA Joint Committee on a Book Campaign for Devastated and Other Libraries in War Areas, launched in 1943.

Also in that year, the RF sponsored Edward J. Carter, Head Librarian at The Royal Institute of British Architects, to travel to the United States to study American developments in microfilming. The RF found Carter to be “unusually well informed” on modernization and international library matters, and, two years before the establishment of UNESCO, expressed particular interest in Carter’s “comments on efforts toward library rehabilitation via the United Nations mechanism.” The RF’s belief that world-wide efforts were required for promoting international access to media and to information made it an early supporter of ideas for a cultural arm of the United Nations. When Carter left RIBA in 1945 to become the first head UNESCO’s Library Division, his contact with the RF, and in particular with Marshall, remained frequent and productive. After UNESCO’s founding, RF participation centered primarily around Marshall’s attendance and active contributions to discussions at UNESCO’s annual General

Pre-existing relationships that Stevens and Marshall had with other prominent library leaders who went on to become active in the formulation and implementation of UNESCO’s library work further facilitated the ability of the RF to quickly and efficiently gauge library and book needs and to plan its responses. These included Julien Cain, Administrator General of the National Library of France, Tietse Pieter Sevensma of the Netherlands, a longtime leader in IFLA who was appointed to head the Rockefeller-built League of Nations Library in 1928 before becoming Chief Librarian at Leiden University a decade later, and Librarians of Congress Archibald MacLeish and Luther Evans.

Postwar Response: Libraries in Need

All involved faced a daunting task. World War II’s impact on libraries went far beyond the unprecedented and devastating physical destruction. Fascist censorship and confiscation policies crushed the European publishing, printing and bookselling industries, while libraries, scholars, researchers and readers were entirely cut off from any and all new material published outside of Europe. In combination, these factors rendered maintenance of existing collections, not to mention accession of new materials, almost impossible for virtually every library throughout Europe for the duration of the war. Predicting the gravity of the resultant knowledge and information gap and seeking a means to bridge it, the ALA’s previously mentioned Joint Committee spearheaded efforts as early as 1940 encouraging American publishers, booksellers and libraries to stockpile any extra or duplicate periodicals or books. RF contributions helped make it possible for additional books to be purchased. As one ALA press release announced in April 1944, “Rockefeller Grant Buys $100,000 Worth of Books.” Similar efforts were undertaken in Britain, most importantly beginning in 1941 by the Conference of Allied Ministers
of Education, which over the course of the next few years became UNESCO’s founding body. Confident that the Allies would eventually prevail, the plan was for these stockpiled texts to be transferred to libraries in need after the war through distribution centers. The two central hubs for text collection, organization and dissemination, the American Book Center in Washington, D.C., also supported by the RF, and the Inter-Allied Book Centre in London, both came under the auspices of UNESCO after its establishment.

In order to remain as informed as possible of conditions in occupied countries, during the war ALA maintained contact with representatives of exiled European governments; after the war’s end ALA conducted an extensive survey of European libraries to create a comprehensive assessment of damage and needs. For its part, RF relationships with former fellows and grantees became a vital means through which the RF could gather information and distribute resources. As soon as the war ended, the RF, the ALA and UNESCO, among others, sent representatives on information-gathering missions, freely exchanging their findings amongst one another. Following a 1946 trip through Austria and Hungary, for example, former RF fellow and consultant Philip Mosley wrote to RF Director Willits describing the “intellectual starvation” for “American research and thinking of the last eight years” he had witnessed as “no less serious than the conditions of physical suffering.”

First-hand reports such as these helped put a personal face on an international problem, and led RF officials to repeatedly remark appreciatively that UNESCO’s leadership in the realm of cultural reconstruction fulfilled a devastating spiritual void left by the experience of the war. Not only did this address an element the RF found entirely lacking in the economically and politically focused Marshall Plan, but UNESCO could reach a far greater geographic area that any one government could. As one country after another was liberated by Allied troops, the
results of the reconstruction efforts very briefly outlined here began to reverse the various wartime trends that had emptied so many libraries’ shelves. Perhaps most essential was the emotional comfort and relief provided. Those under Nazi occupation had suffered a profound sense of isolation from the rest of the world. The wartime planning for postwar reconstruction evidenced by the rapid delivery of new and replacement books demonstrated that they had not in fact been forgotten.

While the stockpiling project was successful, the extent of the need meant that many texts still had to be purchased, not to mention sorted, packed, shipped and distributed, creating an overwhelming problem of expanding scope. In October 1947, an internal memorandum outlined the precise parameters of RF interest in the international supply of books and periodicals as “limited to (1) materials of recognized scientific, scholarly, literary, or artistic worth; (2) the supply of such materials to university, national, or major regional libraries, or to institutes of major scientific importance; (3) the supply of such materials to such libraries in areas affected by the war.”^27 Following in its tradition of funding individual fellowships, the RF was concerned about sending books en masse to a faceless mass of recipients. RF preference was to respond to specific requests submitted by individual researchers, institutions or organizations for particular texts. One reason for this was that RF officials on missions abroad saw evidence of mass shipments being unfairly or inequitably distributed among needy recipients, especially neglecting those outside of large urban centers.\(^28\) Another reason was that such directed shipments could more easily be tracked from sender to recipient, as could their short-and-long-term impact on scholarship and intellectual advancement.

By the end of 1948, one RF report tallied over $879,000 spent to provide American printed material for war-impacted countries abroad.\(^29\) Yet, demand had not begun to abate,
making the prohibitively high cost of procuring books an ongoing problem for donors and recipients. Seeking a solution, on December 6, 1948 UNESCO implemented its Book Coupon Scheme. Developed over the course of the two previous years, with input from Marshall and Stevens, book coupons offered a means, primarily by circumventing currency restrictions, for financially strapped libraries to purchase much needed texts. The program greatly intrigued the RF, which offered that “the officers may present recommendations for dollar contributions by the Foundation to make it more widely effective.” The success of UNESCO Book Coupons greatly diminished, even negated the need for the ALA programs that the RF had been funding since during the war years, freeing the RF to turn its attention and grant funds elsewhere.

Another of UNESCO’s most important early library projects was presented in conjunction with IFLA, a recipient of various RF grants over the years, including $5,000 to resume its activities after World War II. The 1948 UNESCO/IFLA Summer School for Librarians was pivotal for UNESCO in two key ways. First and foremost, it began to draw international attention to UNESCO’s commitment to improving and expanding public libraries and librarianship and international library cooperation and education. The second, unintended result occurred when participating librarians from Czechoslovakia, Hungary and Poland, all member nations of UNESCO at the time, were initially denied entrance visas into Great Britain, where the school was held. After much intervention and negotiation, all but the Czechoslovakian librarians were ultimately able to attend. This discouraging event contributed to revealing how the solidifying Iron Curtain was going to impede UNESCO’s hope of acting as an impartial bridge of understanding and cooperation even among its own members with opposing ideological stances. The RF had similar goals at the time. The language employed in the
following RF document, quoted at length, is echoed almost verbatim in UNESCO documents of the time.

The Trustees discussed policy in the light of the present tense European situation. It was agreed that the Foundation, because of its history and its general acceptance in Europe as a disinterested, non-political organization, is in a uniquely favorable position to promote good will and understanding among the peoples of Europe and the United States. Since the need for this good will and understanding is growing increasingly urgent, the Foundation cannot afford a policy of over-caution, but must continue to move ahead with program wherever there are good opportunities.33

Officials of both organizations believed that their extensive network of fellows and other close international relationships imbued them with expanded avenues of access and influence.34 Both bodies also felt that the particularly extreme wartime damage in central and Eastern Europe, coupled with the restrictive conditions increasingly implemented by their communist/Soviet satellite governments, made the provision of books and periodicals to those countries among the highest priorities and greatest challenges of postwar cultural reconstruction.

Conclusion: RF, UNESCO, and Postwar Cultural Reconstruction

During these immediate postwar years, more than some at UNESCO whose realism could be obscured by idealism and optimism, RF officials tended to recognize that they walked a fine line between being welcomed as a generous provider and being rejected as imperialistic or propagandistic, especially in Poland and other countries of eastern and central Europe. In response to an ALA proposal to build an office in France, for example, Stevens expressed the RF opinion that such an endeavor was not only unnecessary, but also ill-advised “now that the reconstitution of library service is so clearly recognized in most countries as a national responsibility.”35 Indeed, in addition to UNESCO’s dedicated Library Division, unprecedented decrees increasing access to public libraries were passed in 1945 and 1946, in France and Poland alone. These immediate postwar developments, inseparable from cultural reconstruction efforts
occurring simultaneously, point to an unprecedented national and international turn to creating and expanding access to libraries, books and reading.

Rather than a new focus, RF postwar commitment to UNESCO and to books, libraries and librarianship in Europe was representative of real continuity with the interwar years and before. From ALA to IFLA and from the League of Nations Library to UNESCO’s Library Division, RF dedication to the “advancement of knowledge” perfectly paralleled the often quoted excerpt from UNESCO’s mission statement, “…since wars begin in the minds of men, it is in the minds of men that the defenses of peace must be constructed.” By 1951 reconstruction was no longer a top priority for UNESCO or the RF; their library interests turned more to technical advancements and library development. Yet without their dedicated postwar efforts, the rapid recovery, modernization and expansion of Europe’s libraries and national library programs would have progressed much more slowly, if at all.

This brief report constitutes just one step toward constructing a fuller picture that will illuminate the energy and resources devoted by individuals and institutions of UNESCO’s founding nations – Great Britain, France and the United States – to book collection and distribution, and library reconstruction and rehabilitation, in postwar Europe. The ALA and later UNESCO were essential to providing alternate means for often desperate libraries, schools and communities in postwar Europe to attain new or replacement texts; critical to their success was the assistance and support of the RF Humanities Division.

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The ideas and opinions expressed in this report are those of the author and are not intended to represent the Rockefeller Archive Center.
ENDNOTES:

2 “Subject: The RF and Printed Materials for War Areas,” undated, Folder 191, Box 24, Series 900, RG 3, Rockefeller Foundation Archives, Rockefeller Archive Center, Sleepy Hollow, New York (hereafter designated RAC). By the later 1940s, support of Jella Lipman’s Internationalen Jugendbibliothek (International Youth Library) in Munich became a key postwar reconstruction project for the RF at a time when UNESCO was still blocked from providing assistance or support to former enemy nations. For more about this RF-backed library see Peter Andrew Kraemer, „An Institution at Least Half American”: The International Youth Library and the Rockefeller Foundation.” In Germany is Whose Problem?: American Philanthropy and the German Question, 1944-1964, Ph.D. Dissertation, Indiana University, 2004, pp. 158-217.
3 Historian William Buxton also refers to the entire Humanities Division of the RF as an “afterthought,” formed in 1929, a characterization which he argues helps to explain its relative lack of prestige or attraction of scholarly attention compared with other RF divisions and programs. William J. Buxton, “John Marshall and the Humanities in Europe: Shifting Patterns of Rockefeller Foundation Support.” Minerva 41: 2 (June 2003), p. 133.
4 David H. Stevens, “Review of Humanities Program 1939-1941,” Folder 13, Box 4, David H. Stevens Papers, RAC.
5 Appropriation for the Committee for Rehabilitation of Polish Science and Culture, Inc., 15 February 1946, Folder 10, Box 3, David H. Stevens Papers, RAC; John Marshall officer’s diary, 4 October 1945, RG 12.2, Rockefeller Foundation Archives, RAC.
7 The Rockefeller Foundation Confidential Monthly Report For the Information of the Trustees, No. 76, 1 May 1945, p. 17; Program in Humanities Expenditures 1939-1941. David H. Stevens, “Review of Humanities Program 1939-1941,” Folder 13, Box 4, David H. Stevens Papers, RAC.
8 See various documents and letters, Folder 731, Box 78, Series 100N, RG 1.1, Rockefeller Foundation Archives, RAC. According to Buxton the initial steps in the RF European library program were first taken by Wickliffe Rose prior to his retirement in 1928, and thus prior to the establishment of the HD in 1929. Buxton, “John Marshall and the Humanities in Europe,” p. 138.
9 “The Provision of a Library,” 30 August 1927, Folder 1512, Box 175, RG 2, Cultural Interests, Rockefeller Family Archives, RAC.
10 Abraham Flexner, RF, quoted in “The Provision of a Library,” 30 August 1927, Folder 1512, Box 175, RG 2, Rockefeller Family Archives, RAC.
11 Raymond B. Fosdick to John D. Rockefeller, Jr., 15 August 1927. In this letter Fosdick was reporting on his “very reassuring” conversation with Colonel Robert Olds, the Under-Secretary of State, Folder 1512, Box 175, RG 2, Rockefeller Family Archives, RAC.
13 Memorandum, 22 May 1929, Folder 794, Box 60, Series 401R, RG 1.1, Rockefeller Foundation Archives, RAC. See also Statement of Proposed Procedure, The Rockefeller Foundation, The Advancement of Knowledge through Aid to Libraries,” 22 May 1929, Folder 40, Box 4, Series 911 RG 3, Rockefeller Foundation Archives, RAC; David H. Stevens, “The Humanities Program of the Rockefeller Foundation: A Review of the Period 1934 to 1939,” 25 October 1939, Folder 12, Box 3, David H. Stevens Papers, RAC. According to Buxton the initial steps in the RF European library program were first taken by Wickliffe Rose prior to his retirement in 1928, and thus prior to the establishment of the HD in 1929. Buxton, “John Marshall and the Humanities in Europe,” p. 138.
15 Notes from interview between the RF’s Tracy B. Kittredge and Noel Hall and Gunnar Myrdal on Plans for European Reorganization and Reconstruction. 20 May 1941, Folder 205, Box 26, Series 100, RG 1.1, Rockefeller Foundation Archives, RAC.
16 RF inter-office correspondence from JHW to RFE, AB, ME and JMP, 2 November 1942, Folder 206, Box 26, Series 100, RG 1.1, Rockefeller Foundation Archives, RAC.
18 To JHW, RFE reactions to your 11-2 memo on European Cultural Reconstruction, handwritten, undated, Folder 206, Box 26, Series 100, RG 1.1, Rockefeller Foundation Archives, RAC.

20 John Marshall to Edward J. Carter, 30 Jun 1943, Folder 685, Box 52, Series 401, RG 1.1, Rockefeller Foundation Archives, RAC.


26 Inter-office correspondence, 30 June 1948, Folder 191, Box 24, Series 900, RG 3, Rockefeller Foundation Archives, RAC. See also George W. Gray, editor, *The Rockefeller Foundation Confidential Monthly Report For the Information of the Trustees. No. 106, 1 November 1948*. According to historian Peter Kraemer, “favorable mention” in this report “can be considered a sign of a program’s superior merit and value to the Foundation.” Kraemer, “‘An Institution at Least Half American,’” p. 164.

27 “The International Supply of Printed Materials,” Confidential memorandum for use at October 1947 RF officers conference, undated, unsigned, Folder 191, Box 24, Series 900, RG 3, Rockefeller Foundation Archives, RAC. While my focus is on postwar Europe, it must be emphasized that ALA, RF and UNESCO concern extended to war-impacted countries outside the Western Hemisphere, and in some cases their efforts were directed particularly to those areas.

28 See for example John Marshall interview with Mlle Giraud, Assistant Librarian of the University of Bordeaux, 12 November 1946, and with Jacques Guinard, Chief Librarian, University of Bordeaux, 26 November 1946. John Marshall officer’s diary, 4 October 1945, RG 12.2, Rockefeller Foundation Archives, RAC. See also record of RF appropriations to the Universities of Bordeaux and Toulouse, Folder 10, Box 3, David H. Stevens Papers, RAC.

29 Humanities Appropriations, RF 48127 for $90,000 to US Book Exchange, Inc., of D.C., of D.C., 30 November-1 December 1948, Folder 10, Box 3, David H. Stevens Papers, RAC.


31 “Comment,” Humanities Appropriations, RF 48127 for $90,000 to US Book Exchange, Inc., of D.C., 30 November-1 December 1948, Folder 10, Box 3, David H. Stevens Papers, RAC.

32 Grant-in-Aid to IFLA, 25 March 1948, Folder 402, Box 52, Series 100R, RG 1.2, Rockefeller Foundation Archives, RAC.

33 Policy of RF Program in Europe, 6-7 April 1947, Folder 10, Box 3, David H. Stevens Papers, RAC.

34 Alexander Makinsky, “Trends Prevailing in Liberated Europe: Notes of Visit to Paris and London,” A. Makinsky, October 18, 1944 – February 3, 1945, Folder 3829, Box 562, Series 700, RG 2, Rockefeller Foundation Archives, RAC.

35 Inter-office correspondence JM to DHS, 18 May 1945, Folder 2452, Box 205, Series 200, RG 1.1, Rockefeller Foundation Archives, RAC.

36 From the first line of the UNESCO Constitution, London, 16 November 1945.