

In Memoriam

Ainslie T. Embree, 1921–2017
President of the Association for Asian Studies (AAS)
1983–1984

By John Stratton Hawley



On June 6th of this year, Ainslie Embree died at the Collington residential community on the outskirts of Washington, DC, where he and his wife, Suzanne, moved not long after his retirement from the Department of History at Columbia University in 1991. His was a life of stunning accomplishment—as teacher, writer, administrator, editor, diplomat, friend, and superb conversationalist—and a great many of those accomplishments were in the cause of education about Asia.

For all of Ainslie's deep involvements in American institutions, when it came to being American, he was always a little "more or less." Let's start with the "less," though these days it seems to many of us actually more: Ainslie was Canadian. Born on Cape Breton just off the coast of mainland Nova Scotia, he was educated at Dalhousie University, first as an undergraduate and then at the graduate level, and it was through the Royal Canadian Air Force that he became a navigator for the British Royal Air Force in the nighttime bombing missions they conducted over Germany in the Second World War. Ainslie's way of speaking English retained some of that Canadian crispness, and so did his independence of mind.

That brings us to the "more" part. Deeply enmeshed in organizations where Americans have tried to understand the world and become responsible actors in it—the Council on Foreign Relations, the American Institute of Indian Studies (President 1971–1973), the American Council of Learned Societies (ACLS), the Social Science Research Council (SSRC), the AAS itself (President 1983–1984)—Ainslie always seemed to be channeling India at the same time. The experience of living there shaped all he was. His earliest classroom responsibilities were at Indore Christian College, where he and Sue both taught from 1947 to 1957, and his sense of gratitude for being welcomed by Indians into their own circles of intellectual and human exchange was profound. Ainslie was keenly aware of the criticisms that his Columbia colleague and friend Edward Said directed against Orientalism and Orientalists, but pressed forward into the world of common associations and shared histories that connected him to his many Indian friends. He insisted that, whatever else, sheer curiosity had been a great factor in Westerners' engagement with India, and he certainly possessed a deep well of it himself.

One of the most fascinating events of the twentieth century was, as he put it, "the transformation of an imperial possession, with surpassing-

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ly rich historical experience, into a modern, independent nation." He was honored and energized to be part of that twentieth-century experience, especially as cultural counselor to two US ambassadors to India, Robert Goheen (1978–1980) and Frank Wisner (1994–1995), but he always insisted it was only a foretaste of even greater things to come. Three decades before the turn of the millennium, he began announcing to anyone who would listen that the twenty-first century would belong to Asia. As general editor for the Asia Society's *Encyclopedia of Asian History* (four volumes, 1988), he had a chance to assemble and showcase the incredibly rich history that had prepared the way.

Ainslie's best-known work in the service of education about Asia is the *Sources of Indian Tradition*, which he developed for use in Columbia's Core Curriculum starting in 1957; he edited and published the first volume the following year. Shortly afterward, he completed his Columbia PhD with a thesis about the evangelical politics of Charles Grant, once chairman of the British East India Company (1960); the book emerged in 1962. Other monographs followed (*India's Search for National Identity*, 1972; *Utopias in Conflict: Religion and Nationalism in India*, 1990), and it is hoped that with help from Mark Juergensmeyer, the book he was writing well into his nineties can be added to the list. One working title that emerges from his personal archives is *A Worrying Narrative: Defining the Borders of the States of South Asia, 1765–2012*.

Yet Ainslie's special gift was for collaboration. The capaciousness of his intellect and experience made that a natural domain, and he often worked with the classroom in mind. In 1997, he and the Japan scholar Carol Gluck edited the massive *Asia in Western and World History: A Guide for Teaching* (1997). It was an effort to modify some of the presumptions that might seem to underlie William McNeill's masterful global history entitled *The Rise of the West*. Here the focus shifted from the West in (or over) Asia to Asia on its own—and in the West. A second and much-changed edition of the *Sources of Indian Tradition* came out in 1988, with Ainslie still responsible for volume 1, and he was also a member of the editorial team that produced a vastly expanded and revised version of volume 2 under the title *Sources of Indian Traditions: Modern India, Pakistan, and Bangladesh* in 2014. Note the plural in "Traditions," and please note that Ainslie was ninety-three when the book appeared. I can still see him sitting with the other editors just outside the Barnard office of the general editor, Rachel McDermott, engrossed in conversation. Ainslie also worked with Mark Carnes to produce *Defining a Nation: India on the Eve of Independence, 1945*, as part of the celebrated "Reacting to the Past" series in which students play the roles of the historical actors they read about.

Ainslie was famous in the classroom. Sue reports that when he won Columbia's Mark Van Doren Award for scholarship and teaching in 1985, it was one of the proudest moments of his life, since students themselves had made the nomination. Yet the classroom was not entirely sacrosanct. Ainslie could sometimes be seen dropping off for a tiny nap while someone else was addressing a seminar—he needed the rest because he slept such short nights—but he could always be counted on to ask the first penetrating question, as if he had been listening intently the whole time. And who knows? Maybe he was. It was rumored that he could take a little nap while he himself was lecturing.

"Let us now praise famous men," said the author of Ecclesiastes, "and our fathers who begat us." I suppose I have been doing just that. But men don't beget all by themselves, even in an academic setting, and the progeny are not invariably male. Ainslie knew this well. Caroline Bynum remembers how wholeheartedly he welcomed her into Columbia's History Department when he was Chair, relishing the sea change he knew she would help bring to the university and smiling as he saw it unfold. Ecclesiastes goes on to say, "And those there be who have no memorial, who are perished as though they had never been." In addressing the annual commemoration service for employees of Columbia who had recently died (March 4, 1984), Ainslie drew special attention to that part of the text.



I once showed him a black-and-white photograph I had taken of a boy of twelve or thirteen who had stopped to rest at a fence near the New Delhi Railway Station. His shirt was torn; he was dressed in rags. As he glanced back over his shoulder, I thought I saw a smile—that sense of inner energy and resilience that so many ordinary Indians bring to their lives. Ainslie wasn't so sure. He thought the boy's expression revealed not an inner smile but an inner desperation. That sensitivity to the potential underside

of every smile was a crucial part of what made Ainslie such a vivid interpreter of the present and the past—and the future. It was also what made him an extraordinary friend. How he will be missed! ■

Remembering Jean Elliott Johnson, 1934–2017

By Donald, Karen, and Mark Johnson



Jean Elliott Johnson passed away at the age of eighty-two after spending a lifetime advancing the movement of world history throughout her teaching and writing. She is survived by her husband and professional partner of fifty-seven years, Donald Johnson, three children, and three grandchildren. Jean will long be remembered for her commitment to teaching, students, peace, equity, and justice.

After graduating from Oberlin College in 1956, Jean taught in Turkey for two years, received an MA from Columbia, and taught at Mt. Kisco High School. In 1969, Jean and Don were hired by the state of New York Department of Education to develop curriculum materials about India. They spent a year in New Delhi working at the Educational Resource Center, writing and producing teaching materials to be used in American schools. During that time, Jean became friends with anthropologist and Presbyterian missionary Charlotte Wisner, and spent time in the small village where Wisner lived. Jean convinced Wisner to write an updated version of her book, *Behind Mud Walls*, which Jean edited. The pair also produced a companion filmstrip for the book.

In 1972, after her return from India, Jean launched the Asian Studies Curriculum Center (ASCC), with New York University's sponsorship, to handle and distribute teaching materials, which she and other teachers created and donated. The ASCC continued to collect and distribute materials for over two decades. Another result of Don and Jean's stay in India was the publication of *God and Gods in Hinduism* in 1971 and *Through Indian Eyes* in 1974. Jean was also a volunteer with the National Young Women's Christian Association (YWCA) and was elected to be the Chair of the World Relationship Committee. She was active in the YWCA from her college years through the 1980s.

Beginning in 1974, Jean taught at Friends Seminary for twenty years, where she was instrumental in establishing a two-year world history course to replace Western civilization, a major curriculum change. A tribute given to her when she was named Faculty Emerita at Friends Seminary stated: "She alternated between a published textbook and her Xeroxed manuscript. This Xeroxed text eventually became part of the published textbook series, *The Human Drama* [a four-volume series covering 500 CE to the present], which she and her husband, Don, coauthored. Today, the book and other coauthored titles—*Gods and Gods in Hinduism*, *Through*

Indian Eyes, and *Universal Religions in World History*—are used at prestigious high schools and colleges throughout the country. Before *The Human Drama* was published, Jean met with students who were studying history for her manuscript at Friends to gather their feedback on the text. The dedication page for volume 1 reads, 'Dedicated to the ninth-grade students at Friends Seminary whose insights are incorporated in this text and whose lives are shaping the ongoing human drama.' . . . Jean's affection for [world] history and her ability to connect students to it are two of her greatest gifts."

Jean demonstrated a strong commitment to world history and a belief that thoughtful courses on Asia and non-Western civilizations should be taught with as equal importance as those about Western civilization. She insisted that everyone deserved a history and history belonged to everyone. While *The Human Drama* was the culmination of this belief, she also published numerous articles on how to teach about Asia and delivered several papers at the Association of Asian Studies and American Historical Association. Jean developed a set of slides based on her father's photographs of China in 1908, which she published in the spring 2006 *Education about Asia* in an article titled, "China 1905–1908: Harrison Sackett Elliott's Letters and Photographs" (article available at <https://tinyurl.com/ya3eg2d>).

In 1983, Jean won a Klingenstein Award, which included a yearlong stipend to research her lifelong intellectual pursuit, incarnations of the Mother Goddess throughout history. In describing *Shakti*, which is one example of this idea, Jean wrote, "The term shakti refers to multiple ideas. Its general definition is dynamic energy that is responsible for creation, maintenance, and destruction of the universe. It is identified as female energy because shakti is responsible for creation, as mothers are responsible for birth. Without shakti, nothing in this universe would happen; she stimulates *Shiva*, which is passive energy in the form of consciousness, to create."

In 1989, Jean was awarded a Woodrow Wilson Fellowship from Princeton University and became part of a study group to improve the teaching of world history. Building on this experience, she was part of teams that conducted workshops at schools around the country that promoted the teaching of an integrated world history that included Asia and the world beyond Europe. In 1994, she was a member of the team led by Ross Dunn that wrote the National World History Standards. She wrote a supporting letter to all fifty senators, but the standards were rejected because of conservative opposition.

After retiring from Friends Seminary, Jean worked at the Asia Society, conducting the Teach Asia summer institutes for teachers. As part of this project, five teams of teachers were selected from across the country to concentrate on the inclusion of Asia in their curriculum. Jean also spent several summers at the East-West Center in Hawai'i working with a number of school systems across the country. She remained active with the American Historical Association and World History Association, and continued to publish academic articles and produce teaching materials. During 2005, she was a member of a work team at the University of San Diego whose goal was to create a website called World History for Us All. The Association of Asian Studies awarded Jean and Don the Franklin R. Buchanan Prize for *India: History and Contemporary Perspectives* as the best curriculum project in 2005.

While Jean's professional accomplishments demonstrate her dedication to world history and Asian studies, they were but one part of her lifelong fight for justice and equality. She was just as likely to be found at a rally for civil rights as at an academic conference. She developed a class on poverty in the United States, and taught at Friends Seminary, in which students engaged with issues of inequality in society. She stayed active in the Student Leaders Program throughout much of her life. Whenever she heard about some injustice, her reaction would be, "What can we do?"

Although at the end of her life Jean lost much of her memory to Alzheimer's, teachers and students, as well as countless friends and family from all over the world, will hold enduring memories of Jean that will live on in the continuing human drama. ■