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The American Journal of Sociology, Vol. 17, No. 5. (Mar., 1912), pp. 581-589.

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THE AMERICAN JOURNAL OF SOCIOLOGY

VOLUME XVII

MARCH, 1912

NUMBER 5

PRESIDENTIAL ADDRESS¹ THE QUALITY OF CIVILIZATION

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It may be a figure of speech to say that republics and empires have character, like persons; but for such animistic imagery we may plead the pragmatic sanction. It has served us well. Men to whom the gods have given imagination have put into figures of speech well-tested generalizations from the oldest and widest experiences of the race.

Among generalizations that have withstood the wear of use and time are two or three of sociological interest. One of these connects the character of nations and the quality of their civilizations with the ethnic purity or the compositeness of their populations. Another explains the composition of a population by reference to the situation, qualities, and resources of its habitat.

From early times men have seen a significant association between ethnic and social solidarity; between the jostling of ill-assorted elements in the urban multitude, and a relative failure of collective achievement. Both Greek and Roman writers have turned this popular wisdom to literary, not to say philosophical, account. In a well-known writing, addressed to his mother Helvia, Seneca, prime minister to the emperor Nero, has described the social

¹ Delivered at the annual meeting of the American Sociological Society.

population of Rome and incidentally has betrayed his own personal estimate of the civilization which he loyally, if sometimes discreetly, served.

Behold this multitude [he exclaims] to which the habitations of a city scarce suffice! It is mainly composed of people not born at Rome. From country towns, from colonies, from the whole wide world, they flow hither as a river. Some are spurred by ambition, others come to fulfil public functions. Debauchees seek here a place where every vice may be indulged. Some among us have come to satisfy their taste for letters and the arts, others their craving for spectacular shows. People flock hither in the wake of friends, to display their talents on a wider stage. Some are here to sell their beauty, others to sell their eloquence. In short, the human race foregathers here, in a city where virtues and vices alike are paid at higher rates than elsewhere in the world.¹

The traits of Roman civilization are every day discovered in the life of modern nations—a circumstance explainable in part by the facts, in part by the unconcealed historical scholarship of our public men—and predictions are freely made that America, in particular, is destined to repeat the story of imperial decline and fall. Contrasting with this light readiness to interpret ourselves in terms of Roman experience, is our silent admission that we are not reproducing civilizations to which Rome, even as their conqueror, paid the tribute of respect.

No historian has proclaimed resemblance between any modern people and the creators of that majestic civilization which for four thousand years endured in the Valley of the Nile. Splendid and imperishable, Egypt stands supreme and apart. Protected by desert frontiers from recurrent invasion, and from immigration on the great scale, her people, more homogeneous than any other vast population of which we have record, developed a community of mind which enabled them without the harsher features of despotism to combine their efforts in an amazing collective efficiency. Intellectual and economic power, religious and artistic sincerity, expressing themselves through the perfect co-operation of men who spontaneously felt alike and thought alike, produced that unrivaled unity and stability which stamped the quality of incomparable dignity upon Egyptian civilization.

¹ Seneca *Cons. ad Helviam* 6.

There is no other land like Egypt, and so it has happened that regions bountiful enough to support dense populations have attracted a multitude of ill-assorted elements. And with what result? The confusion of tongues at Babylon was typical of the incapacity of mixed multitudes for great co-operation, except as they have been organized by external authority, or have themselves evolved the boss imperator. If their territory has been exposed to invasion, they have fallen under the yoke of a conqueror, or war has hammered them into a more or less mechanical cohesion. In either case, they have developed a militaristic empire which commonly has displayed the qualities of power and splendor, but at the cost of freedom.

In regions not favorable to large military operations, like the Aegean Islands, or the diversified coasts of mainland Greece, mixed populations, maintaining their local liberties, have created civilizations marked by intellectual expansion, but not safeguarded by political cohesion. Too frail to hold their own in the struggle for existence, they have left their priceless treasures of thought and art a heritage to ruder but sturdier folk.

Thus in contrast to the strong but not inhumanly despotic, the vigorously creative but not ideally free civilization of homogeneous Egypt, two original and distinct types of civilization appear to have been created in the early days by mixed populations; the one harshly despotic but effective, the product of incessant war; the other free and differentiated, intellectually and morally dynamic, but unstable, the product of an exuberant community life under conditions of local security.

Rome, militaristic for purposes of expansion chiefly, and not compelled to fight incessantly for her life with enemies nearly as strong as herself, created a civilization of compromise. Imperially strong, she often respected and safeguarded the local liberties of her component parts, and usually protected the personal liberties of her citizens. Under these conditions an individualism arose which submitted itself as least conventionally to the imperial will, but displayed little sense of obligation to the collective welfare. It is the compromise civilization of Rome which survives in our world today.

The resources of a new continent have drawn to America a population as variegated as that which crowded the Euphrates valley; more miscellaneous than that by the Tiber. Protected by ocean barriers against military invasion, and not compelled, as Rome was, to conquer room for free expansion, the American population is working out an experiment largely new. With a minimum of foreign war, and without militarism, it has created a more than imperial political solidarity with exceedingly little restraint of local or personal liberty. It has created, too, an individual enterprise without parallel, but it has yet to achieve the diversified and finer results of collective efficiency.

For sectarian liberty and local independence the colonists of New England sacrificed most other things that men held dear; but it was not community life of any kind, it was, on the contrary, an untrammelled individualism that gripped the imagination and fixed the habit of those pioneer adventurers who conquered the wilderness beyond the Appalachian ranges and traversed the plains of the West. And in those environments the opportunities for individual achievement have been limitless and intoxicating. It is therefore not strange that men of obscure origin have wielded in America a power greater than that of old-world kings, not occasionally, as from time to time has happened in other lands, but in so many hundreds of instances that no one can recall them all. By sheer individual effort and individually controlled organization, we have created in less than three hundred years the greatest aggregation ever seen, of industry and graft, of capital and wreckage, of toil and luxury, of comfort and misery, of sanctification and crime.

In the domain of collective achievement we have attained no corresponding pre-eminence, although we have accomplished much that has been worth while. On the executive side our central government is strong and our state governments are vigorous, because they are products of a party system built up by machine methods under that boss leadership which always, in the last resort, is the unifying political agency in mixed populations. In matters of administrative detail, it is generally acknowledged, we have been wasteful and incompetent, while on the legislative side

of our political endeavor, we have conspicuously shown the ineffectiveness of unlike-minded men in co-operative undertakings. Our legislation has been discontinuous and unco-ordinated, a product largely of shameless bargaining among conflicting interests.

Nor have we yet by any happy combination of public activity with individual enterprise arrived at those results of collective effort which high civilization is supposed to afford. We do not effectively protect life against criminal attack or against industrial accident, certainly not in the measure which European experience has shown to be attainable. We do not so plan and build our towns that they shall be safe against the elemental risk of fire, or beautiful to look upon, or satisfying to the mind.

We have, however, developed a strong national feeling and an intense American loyalty. Notwithstanding the heterogeneity of our population, we acknowledge a certain solidarity of sentiment, and it appears to be fortified and more or less guided by an increasing solidarity of opinion.

We are in the habit of attributing this measure of agreement to example and suggestion, to an unconscious influence and a conscious teaching proceeding from a hitherto dominant Anglo-Saxon stock. We explain so much solidarity of mind and heart as now prevails as a product largely of assimilation, and our faith in the American future rests chiefly in our ability further to assimilate the differing minds and wills of our citizens of foreign birth.

It is worth while, therefore, to ask what assimilative forces have chiefly been effective thus far in our American life, and are likely further to strengthen such community of spirit as may yet give to our civilization the qualities of unity, effectiveness, and dignity, without restraint of freedom.

First among these forces I think we must name a powerful economic influence, namely, the standardizing of consumption. The immigrant discards the costume of his native land and adopts American clothing. With it he demands for his house and table the products that "everybody" has. This phrase almost literally describes the economic satisfactions of our entire well-to-do population. We have only to call to mind such articles of universal use as the carpet or rug, wall-paper, table linen, piano or phono-

graph, expensive clothing and jewelry, and to reflect upon the enormous investment in such costly comforts as the automobile, adopted by classes that were supposed to be unable to afford them, to realize how tremendous has become the standardizing influence of example and imitation in this field of economic consumption. As consumers of wealth we exhibit an amazing mental and moral solidarity. We want the same things. We have the same tastes. So far as this part of our life is concerned at least, we have the basis and the fact of a universal consciousness of kind.

On this fact rests the pertinent rejoinder to social theories which allege that neither the consciousness of kind itself nor any underlying community of thought and feeling, can henceforth be the ground of social solidarity or the characteristic phenomenon of the social mind. The vast economic operations of modern times are carried on through specialization, and the industrial system, as we frankly recognize, is more and more becoming a correlation of differences in a working organization. Therefore, it is contended—for example by Emile Durkheim—that it is only the primitive undifferentiated group that is held together by a consciousness of kind. The modern complex group is an economic fact, and the social consciousness, as Professor Cooley explains it, is the recognition quite as much of complementary differences as of mental and moral similarities.

Now what actually has happened in the economic evolution of modern populations has been on the side of production a marvelous differentiation and development of the division of labor; on the side of consumption, an equally marvelous standardizing and assimilation. In the primitive community or in the undeveloped rural community of the present time, every family produces many things, and each individual is to some extent a Jack-of-all-trades. At the same time each individual as a consumer proudly asserts his individuality. He wears his hair long or short, according to his whim, and never tires of declaiming against the manners and the morals of those city folk who must follow fashion at any cost. In the urban community, on the other hand, consumption is remorselessly ruled by the mode, while in the productive realm the Jack-of-all-trades and master of none is ever looking for a job.

Moreover, if our accepted economic philosophy is sound, it is because of the standardization of consumption that we are enabled continually to differentiate the processes of production, and to specialize abilities. For while, as Adam Smith demonstrated, the division of labor is limited by the extent of the market, the extent of the market, as perhaps Smith did not quite so clearly see, is ultimately determined by the standardization of consumption.

It therefore seems a safe assumption that the characteristic economic evolution of modern times, while producing differentiated ability as an incident of production, is also inevitably producing a remarkable uniformity of mind and habit in respect of consumption, and therefore an ever-increasing consciousness of kind to balance and control the consciousness of difference.

A second assimilating force is the scientific view of nature, which all mankind is being forced to adopt because of our modern methods of getting a living.

For ten thousand years or more, the human race has lived by belief; it will live henceforth by knowledge. Its belief has been nine-tenths credulity, to one part of reasonable and sustaining faith in the possibilities of life. It has believed in luck and magic, in miracle and providential aid. By luck it has subsisted on fish and game; by magic it has sustained the fertility of its fields; by miracle and providential aid it has harvested its crops and brought its ships to port.

The religions of luck and miracle have been a multitude of faiths that no man could number. Each has united a band, a sect, or a greater body of devotees, but each of these bodies has distrusted and anathematized all others. And so long as religious differences have played a vital part in life, assimilation and a universal consciousness of kind have been impossible.

But henceforth, in our own land at least, the people will not get their bread by luck, nor yet by miracle. Not only our manufacturing industries and our mining operations but also our commerce and our agriculture rest today firmly and broadly upon the scientific interpretation of nature. On every farm the boy learns something of chemistry and biology, as in every shop he learns something of mechanics, of thermodynamics, and of electricity. And so it is

coming about that millions of human beings can no longer be mentally diverse in quite the same old fashion. They can no longer swear by quite so many strange and jealous gods. They must think and they will think the same thoughts. They must view Nature in the same way, and look forth upon life from the same point of observation, not because they have been converted by any proselyter, but because only thus, under modern conditions, can they obtain their daily bread.

Accepting the scientific basis, mankind today, with standardized wants and specialized abilities, knowing the secrets of Nature, and controlling her forces, is producing wealth, continuously, enormously and with accelerating velocity. The reorganization of human relations on the basis of justice and kindness, has not kept pace with our mastery of material conditions. Income has increased more rapidly than it has been diffused. A class struggle has begun, and it is becoming a controlling factor in our political evolution.

It may seem paradoxical to say, but is it not probably true, that this struggle will be a third and extremely effective assimilating influence? Has it not already been productive of an intense interest in social problems; has it not profoundly troubled the fountains of humane feeling? As the new ways of getting a living have compelled men to cultivate the scientific habit of mind, will not the class struggle compel them also to fix attention with increasing seriousness upon the nature and the possible attainment of social justice?

Perhaps the most remarkable and probably the most hopeful development in our political life since the Civil War is the increasing attention to things as over against an undue attention to persons. The weakness of representative government is its unfortunate psychological reaction. It permits men indolently to give over to delegated agents the consideration of concrete questions of public policy, with the result—all too apparent in our American life—that political activity is resolved into a struggle over candidates, while we neglect to grapple earnestly with questions. The strength of direct democracy lies in its educative efficacy. It tempts and stimulates the citizen to think with such intellectual power as he

possesses upon the questions, the issues themselves. It was this virtue that made the New England town meeting the greatest school of political science and art that has existed among men. In the spread of direct democracy today, and in learning how to use the initiative and the referendum, the American people are learning at last, as the New England people learned generations ago, how to think about things as well as to care about candidates. And this habit of thought provoked and compelled by the class struggle—itsself an effect of our economic evolution—must prove to be an assimilative influence of almost incalculable power.

Together these assimilative influences—the standardizing of consumption, the scientific view of nature, the attention to social justice—will slowly blend the feelings and the thoughts of our ethnically variegated populace. They will create in our mighty population the true solidarity of mind and heart. And of this solidarity shall there not be born a civilization whose qualities shall be dignity and sobriety superadded to zeal; of beauty and graciousness superadded to power.