ESTIMATES OF THE AMERICAN CHARACTER 1946-1962

A GUIDE FOR PRODUCERS AND STUDENTS OF BROADCAST TELEVISION PROGRAMS

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By

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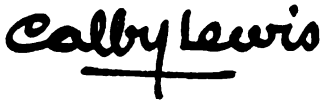

ABSTRACT

ESTIMATES OF THE AMERICAN CHARACTER 1946-1962

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This study collects and correlates what sociologists and other eminent scholars and professional people have considered to be the prominent traits of the American Character as manifested since the end of World War II, a period which embraces the initial years of television broadcasting.

The purpose of the study is twofold. First, it hopes to help students of American broadcasting to understand why the television programs of this period are as they are. For what Kracauer has said of film may be also applied to television programs: their technique, content, and evolution are fully understandable only in relation to the psychological pattern of the nation, both because they are the produce of teamwork, which tends to suppress individual peculiarities in favor of traits common to many people, and because they address themselves and appeal to the anonymous multitudes and can therefore be supposed to satisfy existing mass desires.[1]

When, in the words of Wolfenstein and Leites, "productions gain the sympathetic response of a wide audience it is likely that their producers

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[1]Siegfried Kracauer, From Caligari to Hitler, (New York: The Noonday Press, Inc., 1959), p. 5.

have tapped within themselves the reservoir of common day-dreams."[2] Whence follows the second purpose of this study: to help prospective television producers gain a better knowledge of the public to which they propose to appeal.

Toward these ends, the major portion of the study is devoted to a compilation of values, attitudes, and traits which sociological and historical experts have identified as essential characteristics of modern American society. These characteristics are discussed under the headings of Materialism, Equality, Conformity, Progress, Success, Youth, Education, Government, and Religion. This compilation fulfills the major purpose of the study.

The final section points towards further research. It cites some of the ways in which noted media critics, leaders, and scholars believe the facets of the American Character are reflected in television program fare. These opined correlations are not exhaustive, and any attempt to check their validity is left to future researchers who, it is hoped, will continue to progress towards a better understanding of the Great American Audience.

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[2] Martha Wolfenstein and Nathan Leites, Movies a Psychological Study, (Glencoe, Illinois: The Free Press, 1950), p. 13.

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Initially I want to thank the members of the staff of the Department of Television and Radio. Each has been helpful and has contributed in some manner to my understanding of broadcasting in modern American society. In particular, I am grateful to Dr. Colby Lewis for his tireless efforts in my behalf. I deeply appreciate the many long hours which he generously devoted to discussion of the issues and questions such a study generates. I also wish to thank my parents for their help and encouragement, which made this study possible to complete.

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Character is complex--hard to define
Suggestions for further research
Television can contribute to the American Character

CHAPTER I

SOCIAL CHARACTERISTICS AND THE AMERICAN MASS MEDIA

In the annals of time, television must be considered a recent innovation. It has flourished principally since the conclusion of World War II, (hence the time limitations accorded to this study), but in this comparatively brief period it has become a vital and powerful part of modern American society. Each day, millions of people depend upon it to provide information, education, and entertainment.

In the United States system of free competitive enterprise, television and the other mass media tend to follow the nature of the society. As noted sociologist David Riesman has observed: "It is obviously impossible neatly to separate the media from their wider cultural context..".[1] Communications scholar Wilbur Schramm has studied the manner in which mass media and society affect each other, but says: "I stand rather on the side of the people who think that taste shapes the media".[2] In another commentary Milton Klonsky has pointed out his belief that the mass arts and contemporary life reflect each other closely, feature by feature.[3]

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[1] David Riesman, The Lonely Crowd, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1950, third printing 1961), p. 61.

[2] Wilbur Schramm, Responsibility in Mass Communication, (New York: Harper, 1957), p. 275.

[3] C. Wright Mills, White Collar, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1951), p. 333.

Since television is a medium which conveys the products of other media such as drama and film, it is helpful to consider the views of theatrical and motion picture authorities.

Walter Kerr, drama critic of the New York Herald-Tribune has written that "The theater does become a mirror of that (American) character and in reflecting an aspect of it helps to crystallize it..".[4] In another comment Mr. Kerr expresses his opinion that "Strictly speaking, the arts echo rather than propose a new state of mind. They are trying to hear and see something and then 'get it down'. That is their nature."[5]

The Hollywood "movie" industry also seems to be concerned with the national character. In a 1960 article, motion picture executive Dore Schary wrote: "Our culture, including the motion picture, which has accurately portrayed American character in the past, will continue to keep pace."[6] Former critic and Brandeis University Professor Louis Kronenberger concurs: the movies and TV are affected by all our national shibboleths, hayseed tastes, provincial prejudicies and small-town intolerances. Any final verdict on Hollywood or television must be tied in with a comprehensive evaluation of American society".[7]

In their study of the movies Martha Wolfenstein and Nathan Leites observed that "Where a group of people share a common culture, they are likely to have certain day-dreams in common. We talk for example of the

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[4]Donald McDonald, State and Screen, (Santa Barbara, California: Fund for the Republic Inc., 1962), p. 27.

[5]Ibid., p. 13.

[6]Dore Schary, "Our Movie Mythology", The Reporter, March 3, 1960, p. 42.

[7]Louis Kronenberger, Company Manners, (New York: Mentor 1955), p. 39.

American dream of which success in the sense of continually rising to better jobs and higher income, and the acquisition of gleaming cars and ice-boxes are components. The common day-dreams of a culture are in part the sources, in part the products of its popular myths, stories, plays and films. Where these productions gain the sympathetic response of a wide audience it is likely that their producers have tapped within themselves the reservoir of common day-dreams."[8]

Another interesting commentary (about German films but applicable to any nation) comes from Siegfried Kracauer. "It will be seen that the technique, the story content, and the evolution of the films of a nation are fully understandable only in relation to the actual psychological pattern of this nation."[9] He argues that the films of a nation reflect its mentality in a more direct way than other artistic media for two reasons: (1) Films are never the product of an individual. Teamwork in this field tends to exclude arbitrary handling of screen material suppressing individual peculiarities in favor of traits common to many people. (2) Films address themselves, and appeal, to the anonymous multitude. Popular screen motifs can therefore be supposed to satisfy existing mass desires...To be sure American audiences receive what Hollywood wants them to want; but in the long run public desires determine the nature of Hollywood films."[10]

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[8]Martha Wolfenstein and Nathan Leites, Movies a Psychological Study, (Glencoe, Illinois: The Free Press, 1950), p. 13.

[9]Siegfried Kracauer, From Caligari to Hitler, (New York: The Noonday Press Inc., 1959), p. 5.

[10]Ibid., p. 6.

The leaders of network television are also aware of the relationship of the mass media to society. Dr. Frank Stanton, president of the Columbia Broadcasting System, testified before the Federal Communications Commission that American television "is operating as but one part of the whole of society of this nation".[11] NBC's Mort Werner, Vice President of Programs, recently reminded producers that it is an NBC policy for its dramas to present "a resonable reflection of the contemporary American scene".[12] In a 1961 speech Robert W. Sarnoff, NBC Chairman of the Board of Directors, stated that "the television network is peculiarly an institution of our American society; and its nature and function, its values and shortcomings reflect the character of that society".[13] Further, Mr. Sarnoff believes that "The network serves an affirmative social value by organizing and maintaining a national program structure which reflects the diversity of interests within our society."[14]

Prominent educators have also commented on this subject. Arthur Schlesinger Jr. has observed that television is obviously bound to operate within prevailing tastes and values.[15] Similarly, Fordham University anthropologist J. Franklin Ewing pointed out that "We must remind ourselves

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[10] Ibid., p. 6.

[11] John Bartlow Martin, "Television USA", Wasteland or Wonderland?" Saturday Evening Post, October 21, 1961, p. 23.

[12] Ogden Dwight, "Reflections on TV", Des Moines (Iowa) Register, June 10, 1962, p. 2-TV.

[13] Robert W. Sarnoff, "The Television Network and American Society", (An address delivered at the University of Pennsylvania, April 6, 1961).

[14] Ibid.

[15] Arthur Schlesinger Jr., "How Television Can Meet Its Responsibilities", TV Guide Roundup, Philadelphia: Triangle Publications, 1961, p. 145.

that television is part of our culture pattern, and, as such, integrates with the totality of our civilization".[16] "Television content is a symptom of our social problems more than it is a cause of them. We may decry the great incidence of violence in the medium, but we must also remember that the age of mass communication has been an age characterized by violence. In television, American society sees its own world reflected--of business, politics, wealth, power, religion, race and sometimes their forceful clashes. Can our society condemn television without condemning itself?"[17]

Television is definitely a mass medium. However, mass appeal "does not simply reflect an 'average' taste of the other not-so-great audiences."[18]

Since leading television executives and recognized scholars have observed the close relationship between society and TV, it would seem worthwhile to explore the American character which apparently exerts such strong influence. "What are the social characteristics of the audience which accepts or rejects....the program?"[19]

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[16] Edward Walsh, "Scapegoat for Our Social Ills", TV Guide November 3, 1961, pp. 6-7 (quotes J. Franklin Ewing).

[17] Ibid., p. 7.

[18] Kurt Lang, "Mass Appeal and Minority Tastes", Mass Culture, ed. Bernard Rosenberg, and David Manning White, (Glencoe, Illinois: The Free Press, 1957), p. 384.

[19] W. Lloyd Warner, American Life: Dream and Reality, (New York: Harper, 1952), p. 213.

CHAPTER II

THE PRODUCER'S CONCERN WITH THE AMERICAN CHARACTER

The modern-day producer of mass television programs possesses the often thankless task of providing entertainment, education, and information on a scale unprecedented in history. His is a constant search for new ideas, new talent, and new material -- or at least a new combination of the basic elements -- which will be accaptable to the Great American Audience. The producer always needs to understand the program's intended audience.

True, "Each mass medium resigned itself long ago to losing some segment of the total audience with any particular program."[20] No matter how generalized it might be, the program (except for special presentations as the President's address to the nation) cannot attract the total audience. But even the members of smaller audiences still share certain behavioral tendencies which result from their common residence in the American environment; and when the historical and sociological interpretations of the American character are considered, a clue to the outlook of the American audience can be gained.

In determining the nature of his program, the producer must consider not only the material he wishes to communicate and the medium through which it will be communicated, but also how the communication will be

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[20] Rolf B. Meyersohn, "Social Research in Television", Mass Culture, ed. Bernard Rosenberg and David Manning White, Glencoe, Illinois: The Free Press, 1957, p. 352.

received by its intended audience. If the essential qualities of the audience are understood, the program will have a better chance of success. Each program may appeal to differences in age, income, education, and ethnic background, but it must also include appeals to the strong components which the experts have designated as common to the American Character.

From an examination of sociological material it is possible to learn many factors which can contribute to the success of a production. The American is interested in certain subjects and will respond to a given situation in a certain manner. For example, "One of the strongest instincts we have is the sense of fair play. We hate a bully. We champion the underdog. We protect the defenseless. We believe in the 'fair shake'--a peculiarly American phrase."[21] Since the obvious reaction of the American audience would seem to indicate an identification with the person in the weaker position, it would be helpful for this person to succeed, to gain his desired goal. Success and the happy ending are additional means to please Americans. If a producer can remain alert to such patterns of the American character, it may be possible for him to direct his program appeals to the traits favorable to his material and avoid problems of striking the wrong sides of the American's general attitudes.

It should also be noted that, since television is a mass medium, these traits of the Great American Audience assume importance for any program. A narrow approach is difficult since "Various members of an

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[21] Dore Schrary, "Our Movie Mythology", The Reporter, March 3, 1960, p. 41.

audience may simultaneously classify identical material in a broadcast as highbrow or lowbrow, or middle brow for that matter".[22] This is a result of the mass audience factor which allows television to place mass culture of many levels of sophistication within the reach of practically everyone. Television allows tens of millions of people to be one audience and, at given moments in time, one group---because of a common response to the same symbols."[23]

A knowledge of the traits predominant in the mass audience can be used effectively in successful mass production. "Effective communication is necessary for the proper functioning and maintenance of simple societies, but it is even more crucial for the survival of complex ones. Such societies must have a common core of basic understanding known and used by everyone, or their complex and diverse symbolic superstructures will not stand."[24] With this in mind, we will explore some of the predominant traits of modern American society.

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[22]Kurt Lang, "Mass Appeal and Minority Tastes", Mass Culture, ed. Bernard Rosenberg, and David Manning White, (Glencoe, Illinois: The Free Press, 1957), p. 381.

[23]W. Lloyd Warner, American Life: Dream and Reality, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1953), p. 212.

[24]Ibid., p. 212.

CHAPTER III

GENERAL ESTIMATES OF THE AMERICAN CHARACTER

"No other people, it is safe to say, was ever so besieged by interpreters; none had its portrait painted, its habits described, its character analyzed, its soul probed so incessantly."[25] From Alexis de Tocqueville through the present day, America has never lacked observers who were anxious to study, analyze, and explain that which they believed unique about the gigantic nation of the new world so unlike the countries of any other continent. Henry Steele Commager expressed his belief that the intangible quality which is designated as "character" was a product of inheritance, environment and historical experience.[26] To Commager, character is "the things that are done and the things that are not done, the attitude toward the individual human being, the sense of responsibility toward society, the relations of the military and the civilian, the position of women and of children, the concepts of justice and of fair play, the ideals that are held up to children and the pattern of conduct that is fixed for them, the moral standards that are accepted and the moral values that are cherished."[27]

Noted anthropologist Margaret Mead has stated, "We are our culture."[28]

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[25] Henry Steel Commager, America In Perspective, (New York: Random House: 1947), p. xii.

[26] Ibid., p. xii.

[27] Ibid., p. xi.

[28] Margaret Mead, And Keep Your Powder Dry (New York: William Morrow and Company, 1942), p. 21.

She explains that "Culture is an abstraction in the mind of the social scientist, but each people for whom he can make this abstraction behave in certain ways, are certain kinds of persons, were reared in a given fashion, and have a given character. Character is also an abstraction, a way of talking about the results in human personality, of having been reared by and among human beings whose behavior was culturally regular."[29] In view of this definitive basis it is interesting to observe Dr. Mead's general feeling toward the American character. She believes the following to be an accurate expression:

> We have a certain kind of character, the American character, which has developed in the New World and taken a shape all its own; a character that is geared to success and to movement, invigorated by obstacles and difficulties but plunged into guilt and despair by catastrophic failure or a wholesale alteration in the upward and onward pace; a character in which aggressiveness is uncertain and undefined, to which readiness to fight anyone who starts a fight and unreadiness to engage in violence have both been held up as virtues; a character which measures its successes and failures only against near contemporaries and engages in various quantitative devices for reducing every contemporary to its own stature; a character which sees success as the reward of virtue and failure as the stigma for not being good enough; a character which is uninterested in the past except when ancestry can be used to make points against other people in the success game; a character oriented towards an unknown future, ambivalent towards other cultures, which are regarded with a sense of inferiority as more coherent than our own and with a sense of superiority because newcomers in America display the strongest mark of other cultural membership in the form of foreignness."[30]

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[29] Ibid.,

[30] Ibid., p. 193.

Dr. Mead further believes that the expression of American institutions and attitudes is embodied in every American.[31]

David Potter offers another observation on the general concept of the American character. He suggests that "the national character is a changing and not a fixed quality, for the culture itself changes; it means also that national character varies from one individual to another, partly because no two personalities are enough alike to receive the impact of the culture in precisely the same way, but even more because the culture assigns diverse roles to various classes of individuals in the society, and it imposes different cultural experience and makes different cultural demands upon each of these classes or status groups."[32] As Mr. Potter continues "There is a vast difference between mere traits of behavior, such as writing from left to right or eating with a fork, which a given people may have in common, and traits of character..." Mr. Potter feels that "It is to this difference that David Riesman alludes when he says that 'cultural differences, no matter how forcefully they may strike the ear, the eye, or the nose, are not necessarily correlated with character differences of equal significance'".[33]

In his writings David Riesman expresses his own idea of character as "the more or less permanent socially and historically conditioned organization of an individual's drives and satisfactions---the kind of 'set' with which he approaches the world and people".[34] He believes

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[31] Ibid., p. 27.

[32] David Potter, People of Plenty, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1954, p. 42.

[33] Ibid., p. 11

[34] David Riesman, The Lonely Crowd, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1950 (third printing 1961), p. 4.

that "the adjusted are these who reflect their society, or their class within the society, with the least distortion."[35]

The famous French sociologist, economist, and historian Andre Siegfried disposes of his estimate of the American and his character with a graphic and not completely complimentary description:

> The American's vitality is linked with nervous instability, his attention is easily distracted, his enthusiasm for action results in overwork leading to nervous breakdowns, his infatuation easily turns to hate, and in the long run the perfection of modern machinery will engender him a certain mental sloth because of this excessive respect for technical achievements and the opinion of experts. He is a new type of man, the product of an industrial civilization which has been permitted to develop fully in the New World.[36]

Although Mr. Siegfried concurs with other critics regarding some elements of the American character, no other author matches his low initial estimate of the U. S. Citizen.

In still another appraisal of Americans, Russell Davenport traces much of their present character back to the early years of the nation. He comments that America "was--and is--the revolution of the human individual against all forms of enslavement; against all forms of earthly power...".[37] This factor, which he calls the American Proposition, is the basis for all other aspects of the nation.

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[35] Ibid., p. 241.

[36] Andre Siegfried, America At Mid-Century (New York: Harcourt Brace and Co., 1955), p. 61.

[37] Russell W. Davenport, USA--The Permanent Revolution, (New York: Prentice-Hall, 1951), p. 32.

Siegfried Kracauer observes that "Scientific convention has it that in the chain of motivations national characteristics are effects...of natural surroundings, historic experiences, economic and social conditions. And since we are all human beings, similar external factors can be expected to provoke analogous psychological reactions everywhere."[38]

As Max Lerner has stated "...if these portraits of social roles that have emerged during the past....seem to have unnecessary shadows and even smudges, it is because the stormy experience of a half century of social dislocation and change, war and cold war, is bound to take its psychic toll from the personality."[39] Naturally the comments on the American character do not mean that every American comes out stamped with exactly the same traits since there are a variety of individual personality patterns and traits, but the central tendency remains. Mr. Lerner suggests that the American character "is a product of the geographic variety, the crisscrossing ethnic strains and cultural traditions and the intermeshing forces and counterforces in a changing American society. The crucial fact is that there is no single pattern that can be called the 'American character'....".[40] However, there is a body of values, social habits, attitudes and traits held in common by most members of the culture. It will be the predominant aspects of this material which the study attempts to bring into focus.

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[38] Siegfried Kracauer, From Caligari to Hitler, (New York: The Noonday Press Inc., 1959), p. 9.

[39] Max Lerner, America as a Civilization, Vol. II, (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1957), p. 656.

[40] Ibid., p. 651.

CHAPTER IV

MATERIALISM

"The United States is unaware of the degree to which it has been favored by nature and destiny, and the extent to which things are made easy when one is borne along on a rising tide."[41] This statement by Andre Siegfried expresses a common feeling of foreign observers toward the wealth of America. As David Potter has said: "Throughout our national experience, the most varied types of observers have agreed in emphasizing America's bounty."[42] "It approaches the commonplace, then, to observe that the factor of relative abundance is, by general consent, a basic condition of American life."[43] Further Mr. Potter believes that abundance is "an influence that impinges upon all American social conditions and contributes in the most fundamental way to the shaping of the American culture and the American character."[44]

From the abundance of America many observers move to materialism. In this regard James Feibleman of Tulane University believes that "the philosophy of the United States may be called idealistic materialism. An idealism with regard to the reality of universal truths. A materialism

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[41] Andre Siegfried, America at Mid-Century, (New York: Harcourt Brace and Co., 1955), p. 157.

[42] David Potter, People of Plenty, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1954, p. 80.

[43] Ibid., p. 84.

[44] Ibid., p. 84.

with regard to the reality of particular things."[45] As Professor Feibleman continues "the curious thing is that the two parts of the American idealistic materialism hardly fit together. Indeed, the situation is worse than that: They are opposed. Idealism asserts the reality of mind over the reality of matter; materialism asserts the reality of matter over the reality of mind".[46] However, it should be noted that this opposition often becomes a workable alternation in America and thus explains a good deal in the way of seemingly irreconcilable policies and practices. For example, it explains the American's idealistic belief that all conflicts can be settled short of war while at the same time Americans are great fighters.[47] Louis Kronenberger makes a similar comment. "The materialistic idealism that governs American life, that on the one hand makes a chariot of every grocery wagon, and on the other a mere hitching post of every star, lets every man lead a very enticing double life, a life of strive and succeed alike, of go with the crowd and yet personally follow the gleam."[48]

Russell Davenport believes that "the American can live his life on two planes at once in such a strenuous way precisely because he recognizes that the human individual may have--must have--ideals. That is the inner secret of the American way of life."[49] "They (Americans) really believe

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[45] James K. Feibleman, "The Hidden Philosophy of Americans", Saturday Review, March 10, 1962), p. 15.

[46] Ibid., p. 15.

[47] Ibid., p. 104.

[48] Louis Kronenberger, Company Manners, New York: Mentor, 1955, p. 33.

[49] Russell W. Davenport, The Permanent Revolution, (New York: Prentice-Hall, 1951), p. 26.

and really feel that they are doing something important, not to enchain the human soul, but to increase its power and scope, and thus help to emancipate it from the merely physical, from the earth. That is the positive side of American 'materialism'".[50] Mr. Davenport points out that "The American admits that his society is materialistic; that standardization is an essential of the 'way of life'; that conformity is a danger..."[51]

Thomas Griffith takes a more critical view of this side of America.

> If cupidity is universal as the sun, it is unfortunately conspicuous in our society for two reasons. One is that we tend to measure success by externals, and externals provide little clue to their acquisition. Sellers do not ask where one got his money, but whether he pays his bills; neither money nor mink betrays how it was earned and Cadillacs are indistinguishable. So long as a society conceives as its end the exalting and rewarding of selfishness, and admires the adroit seizing of opportunity, it finds it a little hard to condemn short cuts."
> "The second reason cupidity flourishes so in a society like ours is that, in our modern day, we tend increasingly to cover everything with the goose grease of rationalization, including in the same protection the good, the bad, and the not so bad."[52]

As David Potter says, "This American confidence that our abundance will suffice for the attainment of all the goals of social justice is evident throughout the greater part of our national history".[53]

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[50] Ibid., p. 26.

[51] Ibid., p. 8.

[52] Thomas Griffith, The Waist-High Culture, (New York: Grosset and Dunlap Universal Library, 1959), p. 217.

[53] David Potter, People of Plenty, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1954), p. 119.

CHAPTER V

EQUALITY

"Whatever else we are, we certainly are the world's most self-proclaimed equalitarian people. The rank-and-file citizens of the nation have generally accepted this view of progress toward equality because it fits with what we would like to believe about ourselves. It coincides with the American Creed and the American Dream, and is deeply imbedded in our folklore."[54]

Again, in consideration of this particular trait, the expert interpretations center around the same theme but the individual analysis varies. For example, Russell Davenport makes this summation:

> The essence of the American Proposition can be understood only against the long religious history of mankind that preceded its formulation. Man first discovered the fatherhood of God, then the brotherhood of all men in Christ; and as he grew in spiritual understanding, he was released in the custody of his own conscience, to seek good and shun evil according to his own lights. This spiritual freedom is real because man was created by God in the 'image' of God. Man carries within him something that the merely animal does not have, the divine spark, the 'image'. Since every man is thus of God, every man is equal, in the sense that no man can claim he is more important to God than any other man. The human individual thus has a special status with regard to all other things and beings on earth: he must live, and must be entitled to live, by the laws of God, not just by the laws and directives of men.

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[54] Vance Packard, The Status-Seekers, (New York: Cardinal, 1959), p. 2.

> According to the American Proposition, this special status of the individual is couched in certain Rights with which everyone is endowed. It is specifically stated in the Declaration of Independence that man is endowed with these rights by his Creator; the Rights, therefore, are not man-made but God-made. They are 'unalienable', grounded in the universe itself, reflecting universal laws of nature: that is to say, they are natural, not merely political, Rights.[55]

In his comments, Geoffrey Gorer points out that American men find the subordination of one man to another repugnant. Americans believe that there should be equality of opportunity and legal position. Further, he observes that Americans feel that authority over people is bad and even those who occupy necessary positions of governmental authority are viewed with suspicion.[56]

W. Lloyd Warner concurs with the belief in equality; however, he points out that there is another side of the total concept. He agrees that Americans state complete confidence in our great national documents such as the Declaration of Independence, Gettysburg Address, and the Bill of Rights. Nevertheless, he suggests that the other side is expressed in oblique reference rather than a direct statement. It declares "that men are of unequal worth, that a few are superior to the many, that a large residue of lowly ones are inferior to all others."[57]

Vance Packard agrees that equality in practice does not measure up to the popular ideal. "American ideology has strongly supported the notion

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[55] Russell W. Davenport, USA--The Permanent Revolution, (New York: Prentice-Hall 1951), p. 34.

[56] Geoffrey Gorer, The American People, (New York: W. W. Norton and Co., 1948), p. 30.

[57] W. Lloyd Warner, Democracy in Jonesville, (New York: Harper, 1949), p. xiii.

that the United States is unique in the world as a place where a poor boy can start at the bottom and become a great captain of industry. Furthermore, according to the prevailing ideology, these opportunities for modern poor boys have been growing".[58] As Mr. Packard notes, this is not true, since a recent study shows that 71% of American sons stayed in positions relatively similar to those of their fathers.[59]

Thomas Griffith states that "since the appearance of equality in American life is often contrary to the fact, we are enmeshed in humbug and that well-intentioned hypocrisy which is also so apparent in the American Image".[60] "We have come now, I think, to one of the principal reasons we Americans are as we are. It is the notion of equality. Most of us feel superior to much of what we see around us. In private conversation we condemn eyesores and deplore prevailing popular tastes. But we hesitate to draw the natural conclusions of such thoughts, for we recoil as if from an immoral proposal at the idea that we are anything but practicing democrats. Of all the characteristics that set the American way of life apart, respect for the appearance is the most dominant. All who would be in the American mainstream must pay homage to that appearance and those who defy it must choose to lead a life somewhat apart."[61]

The British historian, political scientist, and sociologist D. W. Brogan observes that the absence of jealousy allows inequality to persist

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[58] Vance Packard, The State-Seekers, (New York: Cardinal 1961 edition), p. 254.

[59] Ibid., p. 254.

[60] Thomas Griffith, The Waist-High Culture, (New York: Grosset and Dunlap Universal Library, 1959), p. 175

[61] Ibid., p. 174.

in spite of a demand for its apparent acceptance. Mr. Brogan notes that "The American voter has got used to economic inequality and no longer resents it in itself. Nor does he resent even the most outrageous display of conspicuous consumption.."[62] Mr. Brogan believes that this equality extends to the American's conception of his heroes. He cites the rise of Abraham Lincoln from the "log cabin" to the presidency as an example and says, "It was a legend of heroes chosen not by birth but by themselves."[63] Thomas Griffith writes along similar lines as he refers to contemporary heroes. "The essence of the celebrity condition is that there, but for the breaks, go I. We don't worship celebrities; we consider them equals (or even inferiors) who have been favored by special advantages."[64]

Since equality seems to be a vital factor in the American character, it is interesting to note that equality does not refer to opposition to advancement. "It did mean universal opportunity to move through a scale which traversed many levels."[65] "In short, equality came to mean, in a major sense, parity in competition. Its value was as a means to advancement rather than as an asset in itself. Like an option in the world of business, it had no intrinsic value but only a value when used. Since the potential value could be realized only by actual movement to a higher

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[62]D. W. Brogan, America In the Modern World, (New Brunswick, New Jersey: Rutgers University Press, pp. 46-47.

[63]Ibid., p. 93.

[64]Thomas Griffith, The Waist-High Culture, New York: Grosset and Dunlap Universal Library, 1959), p. 173.

[65]David Potter, People of Plenty, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1954), p. 92.

level, the term 'equality' acquired for most Americans the same connotations which the term 'upward mobility' has for the social scientist."[66] Therefore it would seem that the American may not be able to traverse the upward levels but "belief in a democratic ideology provides an ideal toward which we strive".[67]

In "U.S.A.--The Permanent Revolution" Russell Davenport notes that the ideal of equality is a fundamental tendency in American life. He suggests that "The confidence that he is the equal of any man gives the American a certain ease of manner, even a brashness, which can be extremely irritating to those who have not been bred to 'equality'."[68]

> Americans have attached immense value, of course, to this condition of equal opportunity. It has, they felt enabled men and women in this country, more than anywhere else in the world, to find, develop, and exercise their best potentialities as human beings. Such opportunity has not only meant fulfillment for the individual; it has also been of great value to society: it has enabled recruiting talent from the whole body of the population and not merely from a limited class, and thus it has strengthened the arts, the sciences, the economic enterprise, and the government of the country.[69]

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[66] Ibid., p. 92.

[67] W. Lloyd Warner, Democracy in Jonesville, (New York: Harper, 1949), p. 297.

[68] W. Lloyd Warner, USA The Permanent Revolution, (New York: Prentice-Hall, 1951), p. 22.

[69] David Potter, People of Plenty, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1954), p. 96.

CHAPTER VI

CONFORMITY

"Plainly enough, American conformity springs in large measure from the American love and readiness for change. America is so inventive that its people have come not just to follow the cultural fashions but to count-subconsciously at least--on there being new fashions to follow."[70] Thus it seems that conformity integrates with the equality-mobility theme just expressed. It is interesting, however, to realize that "Anyone who might try to enforce conformity upon an American would find out soon enough that where his convictions are concerned he is capable of non-conformity to the point of bloodshed".[71] Still, in many facets of everyday life Americans do, and want to conform to general standards. As the society has been successful it may be as Eric Fromm has suggested that "In order that any society may function well, its members must acquire the kind of character which makes them want to act in the way they have to act as members of the society or of a special class within it".[72] In the Lonely Crowd" David Riesman expressed his opinion that the trend toward

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[70] Louis Kronenberger, Company Manners, (New York: Mentor, 1955), p. 120.

[71] Russell W. Davenport, USA--The Permanent Revolution, (New York: Prentice-Hall, 1951), p. 27.

[72] Eric Fromm, "Individual and Social Origins of Neurosis", American Sociological Review, IX (1944), p. 380.

other-direction, that is, from other parts of society, helps insure conformity. Mr. Riesman believes that America has and is moving toward other-direction.[73]

A certain amount of conformity may be motivated by a need for approval. "Perhaps the things from which the hero suffers most...is that he is alone. As Margaret Mead and Geoffrey Gorer have pointed out, Americans tend to feel uneasy alone; they feel they are unloved and therefore unworthy of love--there must be something wrong with them. They need the constant reassurance of the positive response of others to feel that they are lovable, hence good. The image of the outcast, misunderstood dreamer or genius is uncongenial."[74]

Max Lerner has said that "From birth to death there are pressures molding the individual in the direction of 'what is expected'. The major and minor goals for individual striving--to succeed, to have a job, not to waste time, to do and not to dream--are pounded into him. The fact of his freedom of choice makes it more imperative for him to choose rightly between seeming freedom and the persistent process of social molding."[75] Henry Steele Commager views American life as increasingly regimented. "With the growing emphasis on conformity, eccentricity was no longer so amiably indulged: the passion for creating 'character' which the more popular novelists showed was itself evidence of a felt need. It

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[73]David Riesman, The Lonely Crowd, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1950 (third printing 1961), p. 5.

[74]Martha Wolfenstein and Nathan Leites, Movies, A Psychological Study, (Glencoe, Illinois: The Free Press, 1950), p. 184.

[75]Max Lerner, America as a Civilization, Vol. II, (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1957), p. 545.

would be misleading to insist that Americans were less self-reliant than formerly, but certainly society as a whole was far more interdependent, and with interdependence went some impatiences with independence."[76] William Zabel, president of the Princeton debating society told Vance Packard: "Anything you do out of the ordinary brings ridicule".[77] D. W. Brogan writes that the Americans "all try to keep up with the Jones but they are local Jones, with accounts at local banks and stores".[78] Similarly Geoffrey Gorer states "Each family has its own 'Jones' and is itself a 'Jones' for others."[79] However the narrowing of the gap between the rich and poor in their ways of living is significant to Frederick Lewis Allen. "Today the difference in appearance between a steelworker (or a clerk) and a high executive is hardly noticeable to the casual eye.[80] Thomas Griffith traces conformity to mass production and to business which exerts, as he puts it, "the pull of the profitable middle" which tends toward uniformity of product.[81] Margaret Mead had a similar idea as she noted "Success and conformity-- outward conformity made possible by economic success--these are the marks that one is a good American.[82]

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[76]Henry Steele Commager, The American Mind, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1950, Colonial Press 1961), p. 421.

[77]Vance Packard, The Status Seekers, (New York: Cardinal, 1961), p. 268.

[78]D. W. Brogan, The American Character, (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1944), p. 31.

[79]Geoffrey Gorer, The American People, (New York: W. W. Norton Co., 1948), p. 181.

[80]Frederick Lewis Allen, The Big Change, (New York: Harper, 1952), p. 219.

[81]Thomas Griffith, The Waist-High Culture, (New York: Grosset and Dunlap Universal Library, 1959), p. 103.

[82]Margaret Mead, And Keep Your Powder Dry, (New York: William Morrow and Company, 1942), p. 197.

As indicated during the discussion of equality, upward mobility is a major factor. It is also important in conformity. As Louis Kronenberger said "America should yet be conforming to a basic philosophy, a recognized master-plan--the gospel of getting ahead."[83] In America, however, the pattern of conformity is peculiarly dynamic: it consists of conformity, not in preserving the world one was born into, but in acquiring and asserting the point of view (often a succession of points of view) of the world one aspires toward. There is conformity to a single idea, but since the idea itself is that of material advancement, one comes to imitate a whole series of attitudes; one grasps, as it were, the etiquette suited to each rung on the ladder, while no rung on the ladder is, ideally, the final goal."[84]

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[83] Louis Kronenberger, Company Manners, (New York: Mentor, 1955), p. 110.

[84] Ibid., pp. 110-111.

CHAPTER VII

PROGRESS AND CHANGE

"It is impossible to talk about the American way of life without talking about change".[85] In American society some factors remain idealistically the same but the application continually adapts to the new. Speaking of the American, Henry Steel Commager said, "Progress was not to him a mere philosophical ideal but a commonplace of experience".[86] For example, David Riesman comments that "It is interesting to note how old-fashioned American movies of only twenty years ago appear to a contemporary audience. In part, again, this is caused only by changes in film conventions; but in far greater measure, it is the product of an amazingly rapid growth of sophistication as to human motivation and behavior among movie-makers and their audience."[87] "We pay a sentimental homage to the old, but we do not really prize it."[88] As D. W. Brogan observed, the Americans "have been a people for whom the bonds of tradition have not been allowed to justify inertia, the acceptance of visibly inferior conditions simply because that was the way of the fathers."[89]

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[85]Russell W. Davenport, USA--The Permanent Revolution, (New York: Prentice-Hall, 1951), p. 29.

[86]Henry Steele Commager, America In Perspective, (New York: Random House, 1947), XViii.

[87]David Riesman, The Lonely Crowd, (New Haven: Yale University Press 1950, (1961 edition), p. 298.

[88]Thomas Griffith, The Waist-High Culture, New York: Grosset and Dunlap Universal Library 1959), p. 170.

[89]D. W. Brogan, America In the Modern World, New Brunswick: New Jersey: Rutgers University Press, 1960, p. 6.

This continual desire for change, upward mobility and success have made Americans largely a transient population always moving toward what seems to be a better opportunity. Andre Siegfried goes as far as to say that Americans are naturally nomadic.[90] Geoffrey Gorer agrees. He notes that "Americans, at least until they near the retirement age, regard themselves as transient inhabitants of their house or apartment, ready to move to the bigger and better dwelling which will be appropriate to the greater success hoped for in the future.[91] In any case "The average American picks up roots about every five years." "The result of the geographic mobility is that social status is established less and less by family background, which may be unknown to the judges, and more and more by consumption standards, behavior, school, club membership, and so on."[92] "We intend to move on, and to improve our lot (there may be another group moving because it is coming down in the world but we do not talk about that)."[93] It is probably worth mention that much of this movement has been from rural to urban areas.[94]

The American emphasis on change has existed from the earliest days of settlement. As D. W. Brogan points out, "From the very beginning,

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[90]Andre Siegfried, America At Mid-Century, (New York: Harcourt Brace and Co., 1955), p. 14.

[91]Geoffrey Gorer, The American People, (New York: W. W. Norton and Co., 1948), p. 183.

[92]Vance Packard, The Status Seekers, (New York: Cardinal, 1959,) p. 21.

[93]Thomas Griffith, The Waist-High Culture, New York: Grosset and Dunlap Universal Library), 1959, p. 170.

[94]David Potter, People of Plenty, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1954), p. 94.

American life was competitive from the top downward. There was no real stability, no real security for anyone."[95] However, in modern society the process of change has been accelerated and as a result "we now succeed or fail much faster than we used to".[96] Louis Kronenberger said that "we can hardly doubt that all the rush, the hurry, the headlongness of life has told on our nerves in America."[97] "The strenuous life, then, is an American characteristic".[98] It would seem that such a trait developed in the early days of settlement from the practical necessities of conquering a new land and has extended itself to the continuing generations. The rush, the hurry, the hard work have lead to over optimism in some instances, but it has kept Americans working, risking, and striving; it has sparked our strenuous life.

Thomas Griffith suggests that "the American image is first of all an image of immense energy".[99] And he continues "Our awareness of plenty governs our restless quest for more; we are not dulled by a sense of limitations nor made grasping by a feeling that we are all taking from a diminishing pile".[100] Americans are not a lazy people as long as they can see or understand the goal of their efforts. However, though there is a modern trend toward greater leisure time, Americans still seem to

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[95]D. W. Brogan, The American Character, (New York: Alfred A. Knopf Co., 1944), p. 6.

[96]Louis Kronenberger, Company Manners, (New York: Menton, 1955), p. 16.

[97]Ibid., p. 15.

[98]Russell W. Davenport, USA--The Permanent Revolution, (New York: Prentice-Hall, 1951), p. 22.

[99]Thomas W. Friffith, The Waist-High Culture, (Grosset and Dunlap Universal Library, 1959), p. 163.

[100]Ibid., p. 164.

feel that this must be used in a resourceful, helpful manner. "Indeed, there is a widespread trend today to warn Americans against relaxing in the featherbed of plenty, in the pulpy recreations of popular culture, in the delights of bar and coke bar, and so on. In these warnings any leisure that looks easy is suspect, and craftsmanship does not look easy."[101] "We are so caught up in the complexity and clamor of our way of life that we do not realize how much all of these powerful efforts to attract or divert us are a tax on our spirit: they do a double harm, in the triviality of what they offer and the fatigue which they engender...".[102] Americans are rushed, but the hurry-up features of our society are a natural part of the national character. Simplicity of life is no longer ours, and the strenuous existence is a mark of America.

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[101] David Riesman, The Lonely Crowd, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1950, 1961 edition), p. 295.

[102] Thomas Griffith, The Waist-High Culture, (Grosset and Dunlap Universal Library, 1959), p. 188.

CHAPTER VIII

SUCCESS

Success is the magic word in America. All other ideals, schemes, and practices are directed toward the all-important goal. "By adolescence most Americans have inextricably confused the two ideas: to be successful is to be loved, to be loved is to be successful."[103] "For every right-thinking American the object of life--indeed almost the justification for living--is to be a success, to 'make good'."[104] It should be noted that in America "Success is always relative, never absolute. There are practically no positions in American life where it will be generally conceded that a person has achieved final success and need make no further effort. There is always a higher grade."[105] As C. Wright Mills puts it, "'Success' in America has been a widespread fact, an engaging image, a driving motive, and a way of life."[106]

Success seems possible to all Americans and failure appears remote although such is not always the case. Confidence in the future exists on the American continent more than any other place in the world.[107]

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[103] Geoffrey Gorer, The American People, (New York: W. W. Norton Co., 1948), p. 106.

[104] Ibid., p. 172.

[105] Ibid., p. 112.

[106] C. Wright Mills, White Collar, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1951), p. 259.

[107] Andre Siegfried, America at Mid-Century, (New York: Harcourt Brace, 1955), p. 6.

Success has reached such a dominant stage that almost any way of reaching it seems acceptable to many Americans. "Anyone who can 'get away with' an infraction of the rules, especially the rules of government, without being caught or penalized is an object of admiration rather than of reprobation. Even the victims of such an infraction are not likely to resent such 'slickness' deeply for long. The pragmatic test of success is always the final justification."[108]

Pragmatism is often the key to American success. Even though Americans have succeeded in establishing an image as an inventive nation, actual basic discoveries are rare. "The number of basic inventions made by native-born Americans is surprisingly small; but once the basic invention is made, from railroad and automobiles to radar and penicillin, Americans are unsurpassed in their improvement, industrial adaptation, and above all diffusion."[109] "We are an inventive and adaptive people and thus our whole effort, our whole genius, is to modify rather than mold, to make more efficient rather than more expressive. We are dedicated to improvement."[110] Therefore, to the world "America contributes organization, efficiency, commercial imagination, dynamism and optimism. There are defects to these American qualities: an overriding and sometimes insensitive propulsion to change often takes insufficient account of the

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[108] Geoffrey Gorer, The American People, (New York: W. W. Norton Co., 1948), p. 169.

[109] Ibid., p. 157.

[110] Louis Kronenberger, Company Manners, (New York: Mentor, 1955), p. 23.

values of habit, comfort and simplicity in the old ways, and our missionary-minded enthusiasm is sometimes determined that others must imitate us. But we bring to the world an inventive spirit, prepared to try anything..."[111] As Dr. Margaret Mead has said, "We substituted an ability to analyze and build for the ability to feel and be something different from ourselves."[112] Perhaps the American characteristic of success through pragmatism is best illustrated by the following commentary on the U. S. businessman:

> If he is truly American and not a mere spoiled loafer or secret rebel, such forms of pleasure, enjoyment, relaxation or whatever you call his three or four weeks of sun and spray, must begin to induce a certain restlessness, and then satiety, and then despondency: once the limbs cease to cry out for stretching, the brain will beg to be put again to use. Or, even as he lies prone upon the sand, or sits mindless and motionless in the dory, his brain--with a joyful sense of guilt--will dart city-ward, to the deals, the conferences, the agenda ahead.[113]

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[111] Thomas Griffith, The Waist-High Culture, Grosset and Dunlap Universal Library, 1959), p. 165.

[112] Margaret Mead, And Keep Your Powder Dry, (New York: William Morrow and Co., 1942, p. 206.

[113] Louis Kronenberger, Company Manners, (New York: Mentor, 1955), p. 137.

CHAPTER IX

YOUTH

Another interesting facet of the American character is its "general emphasis on youth".[114] As Andre Siegfried observed, "An astonishing country, where everything is based on the future!"[115] Such youthfulness contrasts sharply with the maturity and relative age of Europe. "Americans wish to think of themselves, to be presented as they were when they were at the peak of their life; they identify with their children rather than with their parents. By the same reasoning, Americans constantly refer to themselves as a 'young nation'. On many counts they could be considered the 'oldest' nation, for no other major power is living under an eighteenth-century constitution, and few are more politically conservative; but Youth is so pre-eminently desirable that it is inevitably ascribed to the nation as a whole."[116]

D. W. Brogan observes that the American preoccupation with youth may be partially caused by the "excessive length" of American professional education or, perhaps, the prolongation of youthful habits and ambitions into middle age. In the latter category he comments on youthful titles,

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[114] David Riesman, The Lonely Crowd, (New Haven, Yale University Press, 1950, 1961 edition), p. 49.

[115] Andre Siegfried, America at Mid-Century, (New York: Harcourt Brace and Co., 1955), p. 5.

[116] Geoffrey Gorer, The American People, (New York: W. W. Norton, 1948), p. 122.

such as the 'girl's', used in self description by middle aged women.[117] Geoffrey Gorer feels that the nation is so interested in youth that "no theory could gain widespread acceptance in America which did not concede that the child was the hope for the future, and that he could, given the proper start in life, go further and fare better than his parents. This belief is basic in America; it probably gained its original impetus in the crucial second generation, when the child was to become the complete America the parents could never be."[118] These were the "immigrants who struggled and denied themselves so that their children might lead better lives".[119] They were pursuing a goal beyond themselves.

Although the identification with youth apparently started with the second generation, it continues to the present and is linked with the hopeful movement toward success. "In the first place, the American parent expects his child to leave him, leave him physically, go to another town, another state, leave him in terms of occupation, embrace a different calling, learn a different skill; leave him socially, travel if possible with a different crowd. Even where a family has reached the top and actually stayed there for two or three generations, there are, for all but the very, very few, still larger cities or foreign courts to be stormed."[120] Continuing this line of thought, Margaret Mead suggests

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[117] D. W. Brogan, The American Character, (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1944), p. 46.

[118] Geoffrey Gorer, The American People, (New York: W. W. Norton Co., 1948), p. 71.

[119] Thomas Griffith, The Waist-High Culture, Grosset and Dunlap Universal Library, 1959), p. 165.

[120] Margaret Mead, And Keep Your Powder Dry, (New York: William Morrow and Co., 1942), p. 39.

that Americans are a people "who trust themselves more than their parents--and for parents read: leaders, officials, generals, etc. The whole emphasis of their education has taught Americans that they and their brothers and cousins are smarter than their fathers and uncles."[121]

The young adults of the post-war era are not regarded by the experts as maladjusted. An example is this statement by Frederick Lewis Allen.

> The figures seem to bear out one's impression that most American young people of the nineteen forties had no such cynical or disillusioned reservations about marrying and bringing up a family as had possessed many of the bright young people of earlier decades. They did not regard marriage as a bourgeois expedient for enforcing a conventional monogamy upon free spirits. Nor did they, despite many warnings of the forthcoming collapse of civilization, regard with undue dismay adding to the number of human creatures who must allegedly confront that collapse.[122]

America retains its confidence in the future and its emphasis on youth as part of the dynamic spirit which makes the country want to express the energy needed to succeed.

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121 Idib., p. 164.

122 Frederick Lewis Allen, The Big Change, New York: Harper, 1952), p. 201.

CHAPTER X

EDUCATION

Americans generally regard education as a means to reach up the leader of success. The young are encouraged in the classroom because of such feelings.

"The American school is, in the first instance, a social device, and an extremely successful one, for stamping the American character on children, whatever their background and origins may be; it is only secondarily an institution for implanting and transmitting knowledge."[123] This statement by Geoffrey Gorer is echoed by D. W. Brogan. He believes that children receive more than formal instruction also. "Schools are doing far more than instructing them; they are letting them instruct each other in how to live in America."[124] In other comments on U. S. education Mr. Brogan observes: "No people in history (at any rate, no people known to me) have had a greater, I might say uncritical, belief in education than the Americans."[125] Regarding colleges and universities he sees that their duty "is to fill that mind with ideas and resources adequate to our age and the most important of these is the ability to see what the problems of this age are and what of the national past is relevant to them."[126]

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[123] Geoffrey Gorer, The American People, (New York: W. W. Norton and Co., 1948), p. 99.

[124] D. W. Brogan, The American Character, (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1944), p. 135.

[125] D. W. Brogan, America in the Modern World, (New Brunswick, New Jersey: Rutgers University Press, 1960), p. 64.

[126] Ibid., p. 85.

Frederick Lewis Allen points out that education has gained rapidly in importance because now more than ever before a greater percentage of young people remain in the schools for a longer period. "This means not only book learning for them; it means also a considerable social education in the ways of living of a variety of families of the community".[127]

In view of this widely demonstrated belief in education, it is interesting to get the opinion of James Feibleman. "It is part of our idealism that a college education is essential--and part of our materialism that we don't think much of colleges."[128] Accordingly Americans, for all their belief in the advantages of education are strangely anti-intellectual. As Professor Feibleman puts it, "Idealism insists that there are no new intellectual ideas to be advanced. Materialism insists that there are no important intellectual ideas to be advanced."[129] Perhaps it can best be summed up by his comment: "We are not an intellectual country. At our best we are simply not interested. At our worst we are definitely against."[130]

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[127] Frederick Lewis Allen, The Big Change, (New York: Harper, 1952), p. 222.

[128] James K. Feibleman, "The Hidden Philosophy of Americans", Saturday Review, March 10, 1962, p. 55.

[129] Ibid., p. 55.

[130] Ibid., p. 55.

CHAPTER XI

GOVERNMENT

Americans have a special attitude toward governmental authority. They seem to feel that the equality and freedom which they prize is dependent upon governmental weakness. As Geoffrey Gorer commented, "The typical Americans' attitudes toward authority have remained substantially the same as those manifested by the framers of the American Constitution: authority is inherently bad and dangerous; the survival and growth of the state makes it inevitable that some individuals must be endowed with authority; but this authority must be circumscribed and limited as legal ingenuity can devise; and the holders of these positions should be under constant scrutiny, should be watched as potential enemies. The attitudes toward the concept of authority over people and toward persons placed in positions of authority are basic to the understanding of American character and American behavior."[131] Mr. Gorer believes that "Americans regard their own government as alien; they do not identify with it, do not consider themselves involved in its actions, feel free to criticize and despise it."[132] He also suggests that "most Americans believe that, whatever their own walk of life, America should be the land of the small and pro-

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131 Geoffrey Gorer, The American People, (New York: W. W. Norton and Co., 1948), p. 32.

132 Ibid., p. 223.

ductive businessman (or would if 'government' or 'big business' did not interfere)".[133] Thomas Griffith views the situation in much the same manner. "Government is usually pictured as big and bad, running all our lives. It is big, all right, but clumsy, and rather than being too full of plans goes panting after the unplanned actions of millions of energetic souls all at work at projects tangental to the national interest."[134]

Dr. W. Brogan does not see this as a new trait, but rather a continuing one. He mentions that the early pioneers often had no dealings with the government on the American frontier. Although isolation and personal choice brought on "a good deal of lawlessness there was real respect of law."[135] He observes that in government "the separation of powers is laid down in the Constitution and is emotionally anchored in American political habits. But a development that is not constitutionally necessary and has no particular claim on popular support has made the separation of powers also a separation of personnel."[136] The British professor is highly critical of American government. "It is clumsy to have the powers of the federal government loosely defined so that they are constantly matters of controversy so that many things are not done because it is uncertain what organ of the government has the legal power

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[133] Ibid., p. 160.

[134] Thomas Griffith, The Waist-High Culture, (New York: Grosset and Dunlap Universal Library, 1959), p. 171

[135] D. W. Brogan, The American Character, (New York: Alfred A. Knopf Co., 1944), p. 16.

[136] Ibid., p. 117.

to do them."[137] He also believes that "A government so organized must often be slow and uncertain in its action, or at any rate, incapable of action in time to meet the situation."[138] However, this is apparently the way Americans prefer their government as opposed to an efficient and centralized structure.

David Riesman notes that many Americans feel that "politics is someone else's job."[139] This indifferent attitude would seem to correspond with other opinions which state that Americans do not feel close to their government.

The attitude of Americans toward governmental authority is not consistant with their desire for possessions. "Control over people--authority---is always morally bad; control over things, or abstractions envisaged as things (natural resources, goods, services, money, chattels)--power---is morally neutral and even, within certain ill-defined limits, highly praiseworthy."[140] And, of course, as has been observed, Americans attribute prestige and power to those who control possessions. Governmental authorities often fail to receive the same treatment.

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[137] Ibid., pp. 92-93.

[138] Ibid., p. 93.

[139] David, Riesman, The Lonely Crowd, (New Haven: Yale University Press), 1950 (1961 edition), p. 167.

[140] Geoffrey Gorer, The American People, (New York: W. W. Norton Co., 1948), p. 39.

CHAPTER XII

RELIGION

A survey of the American character would not be complete without a word about religion in America. In modern times "Religious dissent was more tolerable--as long as it was not dissent from the social creed of the growing nation..."[141] However, along with this greater tolerance seemed to be a weakening of the influence of the churches. Henry Steel Commager commented that the church in America, "no longer able to satisfy the spiritual needs of the community, had largely forfeited its moral function and had assumed, instead, a secular one--that of serving as a social organization."[142] Bruce Bliven compared the past and the present in this manner. "Half a century ago, mankind was firmly entrenched in the theory that this is the best of all possible worlds and getting better by the minute...there was a kindly God in the heavens, whose chief concern was the welfare, happiness, and continuous improvement of mankind, though his ways were often inscrutable. Today we have lost this faith and are 'frightened to death'--of war, atom bombs, and the Looming prospect of a general brutalization and deterioration of the human species."[143] Frederick Lewis Allen commented that he had noticed

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[141] D. W. Brogan, The American Character, (New York: 1944, Alfred A. Knopf C., 1944), p. 32.

[142] Henry Steele Commager, The American Mind, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1950), Colonial Press 1961, p. 426.

[143] Frederick Lewis Allen, The Big Change, (New York: Harper, 1952), p. 261 (quotes Bruce Bliven).

a steady drift away from the churches during the first forty years of the century but a counter movement since that time; however, he fees that there are many "whose lack of connection with organized religion has left them without any secure standards".[144] Thomas Griffith states his impression that "American churches, especially Protestant, increasingly tend to dilute their message and diminish their demands in order to widen their audience, on the grounds that 'you can't save souls in an empty church'."[145]

D. W. Brogan takes a critical view of religion in the United States. "American religion was committed, more and more, to an optimistic view of God's purpose in the world and to an identification of that purpose with the purpose of men, especially American man. Religion more and more lost its supernatural and other-world character. God was conceived of as a kind of King of Brobdingnag convinced that 'whoever could make two ears of corn or two blades of grass, to grow upon a spot of ground where on one grew before, would deserve better of mankind, and of more essential service to his country, than the whole race of politicians put together."[146] Professor Brogan continues his observations. "It is no new opinion that since the Reformation there has been a more open identification of wordly prosperity with virtue than was openly preached if

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144 Ibid., p. 261.

145 Thomas Griffith, The Waist-High Culture, New York: Grosset and Dunlap Universal Library, 1959), p. 231.

146 D. W. Brogan, The American Character, (New York: Alfred A. Knopf Co., 1944), p. 66.

not practiced before."[147] "But the American experience has gone further. In some popular versions of modern America religion, prosperity is not merely evidence of virtue--it is virtue. It is no mere matter of seeking first the Kingdom of God and having wealth added unto you. Wealth, material success, happiness in this world is the Kingdom of God."[148] Mr. Brogan asserts his belief that "Religion became a matter of conduct, of good deeds, of works with only a vague background of faith. It became highly functional, highly pragmatic. It became a guarantee of success, moral and material."[149]

If Americans showed less interest in the churches, certain characteristics still were felt in everyday life. For example, Americans influenced by the rugged individualism and hard work of the Protestant Ethic continued in a prominent position. "The mobile youth from the lower classes shows his committment to inner-direction by cutting himself off from hard-drinking, horse-play-indulging pals: he continues the production of an inner directed character through practicing a kind of mental bookkeeping by which the demons of Waste and Sloth are ruthlessly driven out. Such a person has little leisure, unless he can justify it as self improving, and a life that has never an idle moment must have many a tense one. On the face of it the other-directed person is no puritan; he seems much less preoccupied with waste; his furnishing, manners, and morals are more casual. But an attenuated puritanism survives in his exploitation of leisure. He may say,

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[147] Ibid., p. 67.

[148] Ibid., p. 67.

[149] Ibid., p. 102.

when he takes a vacation or stretches a weekend, 'I owe it to myself'--but the self in question is viewed like a car or house whose upkeep must be carefully maintained for resale purpose."[150]

In other areas "the idea of perfectibility of man, for example, which gives Americans so much drive is a Christian ideal."[151] In this regard another opinion is expressed. Although Americans emphasize the individual, William H. Whyte Jr. sees it slightly differently. With the modern day materialism and decline in the influence of religion, he suggests that Americans feel "Man might not be perfectible after all, but there was another dream and now at last it seemed practical: perfectibility of society."[152]

The churches are still an important factor in American society though perhaps with a declining influence. An overall commentary is offered by Henry Steele Commager:

> Puritanism lingered on, not so much as a search for salvation or as a celebration of the virtues of thrift and industry but as a recognition of the dignity of the individual and of his duty to achieve both spiritual and material prosperity. Idealism, in its popular rather than its philosophical form flourished, for though Americans were by no means so sure of the benevolence of God and of Nature or the perfectibility of man as they had been a century earlier, nothing had as yet persuaded them to acquiesce in a philosophy of despair. For the most part Americans still believed that such words as honor, virtue, courage, and purity had meaning, and if science had injected some doubts, their standards were confused rather than their conduct.

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[150]David Riesman, The Lonely Crowd, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1950, Colonial Press, 1961), p. 157.

[151]Russell W. Davenport, USA--The Permanent Revolution, (New York: Prentice-Hall, 1951), p. 28.

[152]William H. Whyte Jr., The Organization Man, (Garden City, New York: Simon and Schuster-Doubleday Anchor, 1956), p. 24.

> Their patriotism had not become either complicated or sophisticated; they revered the flag and the Constitution, and two decades of debunking did not persuade them to topple Washington, Franklin, Lee, and Lincoln from their pedestals. They still professed faith in democracy, equality, and liberty and practiced that faith as well as any other people. In religion they were less orthodox than their fathers, and perhaps less devout, but the vast majority of them still acknowledged, with Jefferson 'an overruling Providence, which by all its dispensations proves that it delights in the happiness of man here and his greater happiness hereafter.[153]

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[153] Henry Steele Commager, The American Mind, (New Haven, Yale University Press, 1950, Colonial Press, 1961), p. 410.

CHAPTER XIII

THE AMERICAN CHARACTER AND TELEVISION

Americans care about television. Their concentrated interest is a major factor which allows many of their traits to be reflected so vividly in the medium.

A reflection of American materialistic preoccupation is shown by Daniel Boorstin. He believes that American expectations "are extravagant in the precise dictionary sense of the word--' going beyond the limits of reason or moderation'".[154] He continues "We expect new heroes every season, a literary masterpiece every month, a dramatic spectacular every week."[155] Mr. Boorstin suggests that this stems from the fact that the American is accustomed to abundance in all facets of life. The media, according to Mr. Boorstin, have catered to this factor by planning pseudo-events to make news where none exists, and by overexaggeration, stressing everything as "the finest program" or the "best of the season".

American television is deeply involved in this nation's material outlook. For example, the character-merchandising business is one of the busiest and most lucrative tangents of television. Actors, writers and producers are often more interested in the merchandising clauses of their contracts than in salaries. Obviously the race for profit sets the American system apart from the broadcast organization in many nations in which the

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[154] Daniel Boorstin, The Image, (New York: Atheneum, 1962), p. 3.

[155] Ibid., p. 4.

electronic media are operated exclusively by the government on a non-commercial basis.

Another materialistic aspect of American television has been the popularity of the "quiz" or "game" shows in which contestants compete for prizes of great monetary value. The program-type depends upon a philosophy of the importance of materialism and it has gained widespread audience acceptance. Many other programs often feature plots concerned with external situations rather than internal values.

The American trait of equality is easily found in the manner of the TV performer. "All of them come to me as intimate or indiscreet visitors, all of them find me ready to be chummy with them. Not one of these people who are transported into my house retains even an atom of unfamiliarity. And this is true not only of persons, but of everything else, of the world as a whole, things, places, events, situations --- everything reaches us with a chummy smile on its lips."[156]

Regarding conformity, T. W. Adorno suggests that this trait is reflected in popular culture. Mr. Adorno attributes unrealistic, cliche'-like characterization on television to a necessity to conform with the viewer's expectations.[157] He further expresses the belief that television frequently uses a hidden message aimed "at reinforcing conventionally rigid and 'pseudo-realistic' attitudes similar to the accepted ideas more

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[156] Gunther Anders, "The Phantom World of TV", Mass Culture (ed.) Bernard Rosenberg, and David Manning White, (Glencoe, Illinois: The Free Press, 1957), p. 365.

[157] T. W. Adorno, "Television and the Patterns of Mass Culture", Mass Culture, (ed.) Bernard Rosenberg and David Manning White, (Glencoe, Illinois: The Free Press, 1957), p. 477.

rationalistically propagated by the surface messages."[158] Wolfenstein and Leites emphasize that plots are used which show that the bad persons turn out to be good in the end. "They emerge from the shadow of the false appearances."[159] They succeed in proving what they were all along.

The American love for progress shows up in the continual demand for something new, and in the popular program the conclusion must reach a climax which surpasses the original goal. Television is an excellent example of the rush and hurry which accompany change in America. Plot is dominant over characterization, news is treated in capsule form, and fast moving physical violence is in evidence in the "Private Eyes" and "Westerns". As Wolfenstein and Leites point out, "The predominant motive for murder is to get somebody out of the way who has become an obstacle in the pursuit of certain interests. The murder victim thus tends to be reduced to a thing, a block in the path, rather than an object of intense feelings and possible regret."[160] It seems that the victim is considered only as an obstruction to progress.

The American concern for success has been reflected in the media long before television. David Riesman points out that fairy tales and the Frank Merriwell stories are examples of material which mirror this desire even for younger children.[161] Dore Schary notes that "The honest

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[158] Ibid., p. 479.

[159] Martha Wolfenstein and Nathan Leites, The Movies, A Psychological Study, (Glencoe, Illinois: The Free Press, 1950), p. 301.

[160] Ibid., p. 178.

[161] David Riesman, The Lonely Crowd, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1950, 1961 edition), p. 101.

go-getter still wins the affection of Americans today, just as surely as he did in the days of Horatio Alger".[162] As Mr. Schary puts it:

> If we as a people are inclined to look for happy endings, it is perhaps because we are accustomed to them. To this day, whatever its distortions, the success story is the American goal. We believe that obstacles are made to be overcome, that Americans do scale unscalable mountains and cross impossible rivers, and that although we don't like wars we never lose one."[163]

Furthermore, "Anyone who can do anything longer, faster, bigger, higher, wetter, hotter, colder, or easier than anybody else is automatically a hero."[164] Not surprisingly, it is evident that Americans are impatient with anything short of success.

C. Wright Mills suggests another aspect of success, "The Horatio Alger stories of the newsboy who 'made it' by reason of personal virtues may seem merely corny to victims of impersonal depression, yet Mickey Mouse and Superman are followed with zeal by millions, and there is a clear line of connection between Horatio and Mickey. Both are 'little men' who knife their way to the top by paying strict attention to no one---they are totem-like individuals who are seen in the miraculous ritual of personal success, luckily winning out over tremendous obstacles."[165] This latter part is especially interesting since it is the supposedly weaker individual who wins. "One of the strongest instincts we have is the sense of fair play. We hate a bully. We champion the underdog. We protect the defenseless. We believe in the 'fair shake'---a peculiarly

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[162]Dore Schary, "Our Movie Mythology", The Reporter, March 3, 1960), p. 41.

[163]Ibid., p. 39.

[164]Ibid., p. 40.

[165]C. Wright Mills, White Collar, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1951), p. 337.

American phrase."[166] Another noteworthy aspect is that the individual triumphs. "Almost every aspect of contemporary mass communication accentuates individual success. Whatever is done is done by individual effort and if a group is involved, it strings along after the extraordinary leader."[167]

Television features several types of programs which portray the American rise to success. One of these is the Western. D. W. Brogan states: "The conquest of the TV screen by the West is conclusive proof of the power of the legend that for a time represented a fact and for longer met a need of the American social culture, a need for heroes and heroic deeds in an American and egalitarian context."[168] Thomas Griffith sees the popularity of the Western as a result of an escape from the problems of modern life:

> He (the American) is told that everything is done for his listening, smoking or dining pleasure. He is the end man of all production, the object of every politician's affection. And yet, if he subconsciously feels that there is something wrong in American life today, something for which he maybe partly at fault, he feels helpless to correct it. No wonder that critics find significance in the fact that his favorite character in fiction is the lone cowhand who goes his own gait and is in control of his circumstances. The legendary cowhand is a man of common sense and good heart, shy with girls but attractive to them, slow to wrath but quick on the draw, fond of solitude but capable of leading, minds his own business except

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166 Dore Schary, "Our Movie Mythology", The Reporter, March 3, 1960, p. 41.

167 C. Wright Mills, White Collar, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1951), p. 337.

168 D. W. Brogan, America in the Modern World, (New Brunswick, New Jersey: Rutgers University Press, 1960), pp. 92-93.

> when justice requires his intervention to put things right. He is the unfulfilled American Dream.[169]

Dore Schary says the following regarding the movies, but it is equally true for television:

> One Western may vary infinitesimally from another; it doesn't seem to matter. I think it is because the Western stirs in all of us pride and admiration for our own heritage--a heritage we owe to the men of a new nation who carved its history with tomahawk and secured it with shotgun and raw endurance. The details of an individual Western are secondary; what is irresistible, apparently, is that the old beloved tale of a good man winning over insurmountable odds, defeating the bad man in an honorable way, is being retold. In a way, we are repeatedly honoring our forebearers; it is a kind of ritual offering to their memory. As Americans we love a hero, a winner, a champion. It is not in the American character to be drawn to a loser no matter how honorably he lost.[170]

It should be noted that Americans "like absolutes in ethics. They believe that good is good, even if they quarrel over what, in the circumstances <u>is</u> good."[171] The Western satisfies these absolutes by taking the viewer back to an age when they could have been practiced. Characterizing the Western, Thomas Moore (then) ABC Program Director said "Justice is the result of direct action, not elaborate legality. A man's fate depends on his own choice and capacities, not on the vast impersonal forces of society or science. His motives are clearly this or that, unsullied by psychologizing."[172] "The Western is really the

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[169]Thomas Griffith, <u>The Waist-High Culture</u>, (New York: Grosset and Dunlap Universal Library, 1959), pp. 189-190.

[170]Dore Schary, "Our Movie Mythology", <u>The Reporter</u>, March 3, 1960), p. 39.

[171]D. W. Brogan, <u>The American Character</u>, (New York: Alfred A. Knopf Co., 1944), pp. 131-132.

[172]"Westerns", <u>Time</u>, March 30, 1959, p. 53.

American morality play, in which good and evil, spirit and nature, Christian and pagan fight to the finish on the vast stage of the unbroken prairie."[173]

Moving on from the western to other popular types, Dore Schary makes interesting comments regarding another kind of "success" program. He comments specifically on the violence in war pictures, but the violence aspect can fit other types. Mr. Schary says, "It has been my experience, too, that although American audiences go to see good and often bad war movies, they resist documentary films on the same subject, in spite of the fact that several extraordinary ones have been made. I can only account for this by suggesting that while we do not exactly shrink from hard, cold facts, we prefer them dished up as fiction, letting ourselves become involved emotionally rather than intellectually. The best movies succeed in involving audiences both ways."[174] Among the new TV series ready for viewing this fall (1962) is ABC's "The Gallant Men" which deals with the Second World War. Since such a series has not recently been projected on a national network, it will be interesting to observe its audience reception.

Second only to Westerns in the rating race has been the Detective Show otherwise known as a "Whodunit" or "Private Eye". David Janssen, who played the title role in the Richard Diamond Detective series, summed up this type:

> "The Private Eye Show" has the same elements as the western: the hero is invincible; he gets the girls and never marries her; the convertible car has replaced the horse.

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[173] Ibid., p. 53.

[174] Dore Schary, "Our Movie Mythology", The Reporter, March 3, 1960, p. 40.

> (The TV detective) is what sometime Saturday Review critic John Paterson called "everyman's romantic conception of himself; the glorification of toughness, irreverence, and a sense of decency almost too confused to show itself". The Private-Eye is the ordinary citizen, become purified by righteous and legitimate rage--and become, at last, devastatingly effective.[175]

T. W. Adorno complains that the youthful trait of Americans is catered to in a manner far removed from the usual image of the American in the prime of life. Mr. Adorno does not seem to object to the usual portrayal of the American; however, he does take issue with television's bow to what he describes as "an infantile need for protection". Every spectator of a Western or Detective knows how it will end, the happy ending is mandatory. As he puts it, "Tension is superficially maintained and is unlikely to have a serious effect any more. On the contrary, the spectator feels on safe ground all the time. This longing for 'feeling on safe ground'---reflecting an infantile need for protection rather than his desire for a thrill--is catered to."[176]

Gilbert Seldes makes the point that American programs appeal to immaturity by playing to a "family audience" which, for much of the evening, includes children. "The electronic revolution has already coalesced the teen-ager and the grownup completely...The fact that television enters the home is taken as a compulsion to present nothing beyond the comprehension and interest of all members of the family. ...Most of the time the wits of

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[175] "These Gunns for Hire", Time, October 26, 1959, p. 49.

[176] T. W. Adorno, "Television and the Patterns of Mass Culture", Mass Culture, ed. Bernard Rosenberg, and David Manning White. (Glencoe: Illinois: The Free Press, 1957), p. 476.

the adults are not challenged because the entertainment provided is intended to attract children."[177] Left to themselves, he warns, the mass media might find it profitable to perpetuate immaturity.

As previously indicated, various observers have pointed out the tendency of Americans to distrust authority and to circumscribe the powers of governmental agencies. This tendency is reflected in the plots of a great deal of the adventure fiction broadcast over television including the films of the 1940's, which Wolfenstein and Leites analyzed in their book, Movies, A Psychological Study. Summarizing the attitude toward life revealed by the plots of these films, the authors conclude:

> The world, which is not effectively policed, does not need to be policed at all. The hero, the self-appointed investigator and agent of justice, is able to set things right independently. The world thus appears as a kind of workable anarchic arrangement where, although hostilities are far from eliminated, life need not be nasty, brutish, and short, at any rate not for anyone we care about. The official supervisors of private morals, the comic onlookers, are just as superfluous as the police. No one has any intention of doing anything naughty; only the mistakenly suspicious onlooker fails to recognize the natural goodness of the clean-cut young people.[178]

This outlook, they demonstrate, is clearly at variance with that of British films, which "evoke the feeling that danger lies in ourselves, especially in our impulses of destructivness."[179] And it is certainly different from French movies:

> In the major plot configuration of French films, human wishes are opposed by the nature of life itself. The

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[177] Gilbert Seldes, The New Mass Media, (Washington, D.C.: American Association of University Women, 1957), pp. 16-17.

[178] Martha Wolfenstein and Nathan Leites, Movies A Psychological Study, (Glencoe, Illinois: The Free Press, 1950), p. 300.

> main issue is not one of inner and outer conflicts in which we may win or lose, be virtuous or get penalized. It is a contest which we all lose in the end and the problem is to learn to accept it.[180]

The major plot configuration in American films contrasts with both the British and the French.

> Winning is terrifically important and always possible though it may be a tough fight. The conflict is not an internal one; it is not our own impulses which endanger us nor our own scruples which stand in our way. The hazards are all external, but they are not rooted in the nature of life itself. They are the hazards of a particular situation with which we find ourselves confronted. The hero is typically in a strange town where there are apt to be dangerous men and women of ambiguous character and where the forces of law and order are not to be relied on. If he sizes up the situation correctly, if he does not go off half-cocked but is still able to beat the other fellow to the punch once he is sure who the enemy is, if he relies on no one but himself, if he demands sufficient evidence of virtue from the girl, he will emerge triumphant. He will defeat the dangerous men, get the right girl, and show the authorities what's what.[181]

An excellent description of the manner in which the motion picture reflects the changing political situation in new themes and plots may be found in Siegfried Kracauer's "From Caligari to Hitler". This book traces German films from the collapse of the Weimar Republic through the rise of National Socialism. Although it is concerned with a foreign country, it is a vivid example of the reflection of political influence in the public media.

Education also has been reflected in an interesting manner. As

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[180] Ibid., p. 297.

[181] Ibid., p. 298.

Gilbert Seldes has observed:

> We know, with amazement bordering on fear, what the scientist has accomplished in the past fifty years. How has he appeared in the movies and on television? In part he has shared the personality of the educator and the intellectual generally--absent-minded, falling in love with a pretty teenager, a butt of practical jokes played on him by the hero-athlete. ("Mr. Peepers", on television, was surrounded by stereotypes of the principal, the coach, the buddy, the absent-minded English teacher. His role as a science teacher was made to appear trivial and comic.) For the rest, he is either the "mad genius" or the laboratory technician. As the "mad genius," he is opposed to everything science stands for. Instead of trying to discover the laws of nature, he tries to discover how to defeat them. Instead of submitting to the most rigorous disciplines, he comes upon all his great ideas by accident....
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> Another fairly constant image repeats and reinforces the effect of ancient caricature. This is the educator, who appears primarily in two forms - the woman grade teacher and the male college professor. The woman is represented as elderly, unattractive, and frequently less intelligent than the boisterous, healthy boys and girls whom she teaches. The college professor is the conventional absentminded incompetent. If he specializes in higher mathematics, he cannot balance his checkbook. If he is a psychologist, he cannot fathom the emotional reactions of a girl of 17.
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> One variation should be noted: Both types wear glasses and if they are the central figures in the story these glasses are presently removed. The forbidding spinster turns out to be ravishingly seductive and the awkward professor knocks out a bully. On the subject of wearing glasses, Professor Isaac Asimov, who teaches bio-chemistry and also writes science-fiction, has said: "They are merely a symbol of intelligence. The audience is taught two things: (a) evidence of extensive education is a social hindrance and causes unhappiness; (b) formal education is unnecessary, can be minimized at will, and the resulting limited intellectual development leads to happiness."[182]

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[182] Gilbert Seldes, The New Mass Media, (Washington, D.C.: American Association of University Women, 1957), pp. 24-25.

Fundamentally, the story of "Our Miss Brooks," television serial, was still "that of the woman who could not get her man because of intelligence."[183] Consider also the movie or TV image of the active member of a Parent-Teacher association:

> This organization, which came into being to put an end to the isolation of the teacher and to provide a channel for exchange of views, has ended on TV by assimilating the parent to the joke status of the teacher. In this process, the once dignified word "earnest" has been so dragged down that it is now a term of contempt.[184]

As the movies attempt to compete with television, some are directed to appeal to a more specialized audience. This has resulted in more adult themes. Wider acceptance of foreign films has increased this tendency. Recently there has been a marked increase in the purchase of non-fiction books and magazines, and surveys indicate increased interest in the serious music featured by FM radio stations. These trends may be part of a gradual maturation of the American Character which will one day be reflected on television.

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[183] Ibid., p. 24-25.

[184] Ibid., p. 25.

CHAPTER XIV

CONCLUSION

Obviously the American character is a complex subject, is in continual change, and demands cautious commentary. Siegfried Kracauer has said that "To speak of the peculiar mentality of a nation by no means implies the concept of a fixed national character. The interest here lies in such collective dispositions or tendencies as prevail within a nation at a certain stage of its development."[185] Although most experts express their belief that an American character does definitely exist, they describe certain aspects of it in different ways. The subject has admittedly baffled experts on America. Therefore, admittedly, this report does not solve any problems. It is designed primarily to set forth the most prominent aspects of the character as viewed by scholars and critics who are qualified observers of society and who have studied each area in depth. Of course, many traits which some might consider "predominant" have been omitted. I have attempted to include only those characteristics which the experts reasonably agreed upon and which seemed to be of interest to the television producer. Even the scholarly David Riesman commented:

> This possibility may sound remote, and perhaps it is. But undeniably many currents of change in America

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185 Siegfried Kracauer, From Caligari to Hitler, (New York: The Noonday Press Inc., 1959), p. 5.

> escape the notice of the reporters of this best reported nation on earth. We have inadequate indexes for the things we would like to find out, especially about such intangibles as character, political styles, and the uses of leisure. America is not only big and rich, it is mysterious; and its capacity for the humorous or ironical concealment of its interests matches that of the legendary inscrutable Chinese.[186]

This paper has merely scratched the surface of what I believe could be a stimulating research project. It would be interesting in another project of an extensive nature to first enlarge upon the sociological study of America and the historical perspectives which help shape the nation. Further it would be an excellent opportunity to test the idea, expressed by so many media leaders, regarding the reflection of the American character in television. To do so it would, perhaps, be possible to secure the scripts of widely accepted network programs. From such material one might attempt to analyze the appeals used in relation to the traits of the American character. Then, by interviewing the producer, writer, and other pertinent persons one might confirm the degree to which they intentionally and consciously incorporated these appeals in constructing the programs. It would be worth some attention to determine this process in regard to several types of programs of proven popularity. By this and by other detailed research, we might be able to ascertain more information concerning the relationship between the electronic mass media and our culture. How is the influence between the two expressed? Is the impact of the media greater than is now believed? How do the people influence television programming? Will the intellectual

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[186] David Riesman, The Lonely Crowd, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1950, 1961 edition), p. 307.

level go up? down? or remain nearly the same? Do producers consider the American character when building their shows? Is there any way we can determine the effect of the American character on the decisions of the producers? What can television producers do to retain audience acceptance and yet try new ideas? Can the old and new be mixed in a successful combination commensurate with the changing American character? These questions can easily generate ideas for additional investigations and research which would also be important for a successful production.

Both the American character and the American mass media are complex subjects and this study gives only a brief sample of the problem. Besides, as David Riesman has said "Inevitably our own character, our own geography, our own illusions, limit our view".[187] Still the relationship is important and worth detailed research. As Gov. LeRoy Collins, President of the National Association of Broadcasters put it:

> I start from the premise that broadcasting in America today is an essential component of our national purpose. It has a great responsibility to spark free enterprise, but it also has a great moral responsibility which goes beyond a profit-and-loss statement and the marketing of goods--a responsibility to contribute constructively to the enhancement of the character, enlightenment, citizenship, and stature of the American people."[188]

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[187] Ibid., p. 307.

[188] LeRoy Collins, "Freedom Through Responsibility", Freedom and Responsibility in Broadcasting, Ed. John Coons, Evanston, Illinois: Northwestern University Press, 1961, p. 3.

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