

Glad to Be Back in the U.S.A....But Unhappy, Too

AFTER NEARLY NINE MONTHS OF TRAVELLING in the new and emerging nations of Africa, the Middle East and Asia, I am glad to be back home. I return proud of my country but more than ever aware that other people are proud of their nations, too, as they should be.

At the same time I return troubled about many aspects of my country. In the past few months I have seen the United States as others see it abroad and am even more disturbed than before about many features of our national life.

As I return I am proud of

... our interpretation of the concept of democracy as embracing all phases of life—political, social, economic, religious, educational and cultural—and the impact around the world of the idea of democracy as represented by such world-respected figures as Jefferson and Lincoln, Emerson and Whitman

... our virtual elimination of feudalism in agriculture when so much of the world is beset by problems of land ownership and tenure

... our tremendous industrial output, consisting of approximately half of the production of the world in a single year

... our ability to provide a very high standard of living for a large proportion of our people and a respectable standard of living for nearly everyone when compared with standards around the world, with a per capita income of \$2000 here as compared with \$80 in two-thirds of the world

... our stress on the sacredness of human personality, while so many of the world's people are still pulling rickshaws,

toiling for a few pennies a day under incredible working conditions, or being forced to carry "passes" because of their color

... our progress in providing health facilities to a large percentage of our people, starting with a clean water supply, and our tremendous contributions to the world in research and experimentation in medicine and public health

... our strides in recognizing the importance of mental health

... our development of social institutions, ranging from clinics and child welfare institutions to community councils and youth organizations

... our stress on the church as a social and humanitarian as well as religious organization

... the power of organized labor as a balancing force in American life

... our achievement in welding a nation out of the varied peoples who have come to our shores to start a new life for themselves and their children

... our public library system, unparalleled in the world

... our elimination of trade and customs barriers within the vast expanse of the U.S.A.

... our remarkable systems of transportation and communication which have helped more than we realize to make us one nation

... our long and, on the whole, creditable record of religious freedom and our recent progress in race relations

... our growing maturity in art and music and our contributions to the rest of the world in these and related fields

... our development of scientific prac-

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tices in agriculture, with special stress on the county agent and the demonstration plot as two of our best ideas for export

... our concept of a free public education for all, with many different kinds of education for the needs of a vast population

... our research and action programs in the social sciences

... our development of the idea of mass production as it has helped to raise the standard of living of our people and demonstrated a method which others have begun to use in meeting the revolution of rising expectations

... our growing awareness of the rest of the world and our increased interest in our three billion world neighbors

... our optimism regarding human beings and human institutions, which has helped us to tackle many seemingly impossible tasks

... our hard work, which accounts for much of our success as a nation

... the friendliness and good will of so many of our citizens and our frequent and generous personal aid to troubled peoples in many parts of the world

... our extensive system of voluntary agencies

... our high regard for women in almost all phases of American life, giving them opportunities unparalleled in most parts of the world.

At the same time I return grieved, troubled and highly disturbed about many features of our national life, such as:

... our hysteria over the recent achievements of the Russians in science and scientific education

... our phobia about Communism, which blinds us to an objective appraisal of its appeal to so many people in so many parts of the world and leads us to oversimplify international relations to a race between "their world" and "ours"

... our ignorance of most of the world and its three billion people and our parochialism in assuming that the rest of the world should be like us and that we have little or nothing to learn from them

... our inability to communicate with our world neighbors in their languages and our smugness in assuming that all the world should speak our language

... our support of such representatives of the 19th century abroad as Chiang Kai Shek, King Saud, Syngman Rhee and others

... our export of so many of our cheap, tawdry films in view of the fact that this is the major medium of communication through which millions of people around the world learn about us

... our naiveté in believing that a parade of our wealth will make other people want to be like us

... our stress on freedom, rather than the coupling of *freedom* and *justice*, in our appeals to the peoples of the world

... our reliance upon military force and alliances to promote democracy and the lack of attention to the far more important war of *ideas* now being waged around the world

... our inarticulateness in expressing our democratic faith abroad—simply—dramatically—boldly

... our interminable debates over foreign aid and the all too frequent assumption that only those countries should receive help who commit themselves publicly to our programs on international issues

... our tendency to raise questions as to whether men like Nehru of India and U Nu of Burma are democratic, largely

because of their espousal of neutrality or independence in the cold war

... our inability to make greater progress and at a faster rate in assuring complete equality to minority groups in the United States as witnessed by such symbolic events as Little Rock and Levittown (Pa.)

... our shameful record in recent years in civil rights and freedom of expression

... our extravagant and often wasteful use of natural resources in the U.S.A.—one authority having stated recently that since World War I we have used more of the irreplaceable materials in North America than had been used by the human race in all history previous to that time

... our retreats into orthodoxy in education, politics, religion and other fields rather than a continuation of our record of pioneering, leading one to wonder with Alfred North Whitehead whether we have inherited the idea of democracy without the fervor of its early adherents

... our silly and fruitless attempts to compare our educational system with

those of European countries, unmindful of the fact that their systems have been constructed for very different purposes and that our systems are therefor incomparable

... our timidity as educators in presenting the claims of our profession, championing the educational theories and practices which years of scientific experimentation and practical application have proved

... our concentration in recent months upon mathematics and science in education, without increased attention to the even more important areas of the humanities and the social sciences

... our tendency to be “against” something at home and abroad rather than “for” something, leading us to be almost always on the defensive rather than on the offensive in the world-wide struggle for the minds of men.

It has been exciting to be abroad for these several months. I trust it has given me more perspective on my own country as well as on the other nations of the world.

I HEAR MY FATHER; I NEED NEVER FEAR.

I hear my mother; I shall never be lonely, or want for love.

When I am hungry it is they who provide for me; when I am in dismay, it is they who fill me with comfort.

When I am astonished or bewildered, it is they who make the weak ground firm beneath my soul: it is in them that I put my trust.

When I am sick it is they who send for the doctor; when I am well and happy, it is in their eyes that I know best that I am loved; and it is towards the shining of their smiles that I lift up my heart and in their laughter that I know my best delight.

I hear my father and my mother and they are my giants, my king and my queen, beside whom there are no others so wise or worthy or honorable or brave or beautiful in this world.

I need never fear; nor ever shall I lack for loving kindness.—*From “A Death in the Family,” by James Agee, copyright 1957 by McDowell, Obolensky, New York.*