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The share of America
in civilization: baccalaureate
[of the University
of Wisconsin] on
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THE SHARE OF AMERICA
IN CIVILIZATION

By
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The Share of America in Civilization

*Gentlemen of the University of Wisconsin:**

Once going from Europe to Brazil, I heard at table an English writer, a great Eastern traveler, the late William Gifford Palgrave, ask the Captain of the ship what good he thought had come from the discovery of America. On his part he could not see any, except for tobacco. That was the first time I heard that doubt expressed; but years afterwards I happened to buy an old French book, by an Abbé Genty, with this title: *L'Influence de la découverte de l'Amérique sur le Bonheur du Genre-Humain*, and I saw that the curious question had been seriously proposed for a prize by the Academy of Lyons before the French Revolution.

This is how it was formulated: "Has the discovery of America been useful or prejudicial to mankind?" The work is, on the whole, an empty declamation, in which there is nothing to reap, except the hope of the writer in the regeneration of mankind through the new-born American nation. He foresees in the independence of the Anglo-Americans, to quote his words, "the event most proper to accelerate the revolution which will bring back happiness upon earth." "It is in the bosom of this new-born Republic," he adds, "that are deposited the true treasures which will enrich the world." That makes the book worth preserving. But 1787, when the essay was written, was too early a date to treat the subject of the contribu-

* Baccalaureate Address on June 20th, 1909.

tion of the New World to the welfare of mankind. 1787 was already the dawn of America's day, but only the dawn. George Washington was President of the Constitutional Convention, but the influence of the great event, beyond its shock on the Old World, which had not yet produced the French Revolution, could not then be imagined.

There is in the life of the nations a period in which the part distributed to them has not yet been revealed. The character of the Roman influence could not be foretold even during the great days of the Republic. A talk between Cicero and Cæsar about the part of Gaul or of Britain in History would not take in consideration France or England; while one between Charlemagne and Alcuin about the part of Germany would be only a tale of the Middle Ages, now nearly forgotten. Even to-day who could say anything essential on the part of Japan or of China? Japan can be said to be in her dawn for the outside world, while China continues veiled in her long night, shining for herself alone. Who can even imagine what will be the record of either in the history of mankind? But it is no longer too early to study the share of America in Civilization. We do not know her possibilities in the future, as we do not know those of electricity; but we know already what electricity is, and so with your national individuality, we know already what it is. Nations reach at a certain time their full growth as individualities; you seem to have reached yours. We are therefore better prepared than was the French Abbé, on the eve of the French Revolution to speak of it.

I had already chosen this fascinating subject when my attention was called to the admirable Address of President Eliot on it, years ago, pointing out five great

American contributions to Civilization. These were, in his words: first, and principal, the substitution of discussion and arbitration to war as the means of settling disputes between nations; second, the widest religious toleration; third, manhood suffrage; fourth, the demonstration of the fitness of a great variety of races for political freedom; fifth, the diffusion of material well-being among the population.

I do not think all the points claimed as American contributions by President Eliot will bear in history the mark—*made in America*, but I think all of them passed here through such transformation and improvement that they all deserve in part that mark.

Still, we must be as careful in not writing the history of Civilization without taking into account the rest of mankind as we would be in not writing it without America. The American race is not a race born of a sudden in an advanced state of civilization. It was in the time of the Country's formation the English race, only brought up in different surroundings; and now it is the fusion, under its predominance, of that race with other races. Most probably the destiny of mankind would in the end be the same, if America had never appeared above the water; still, without it, much that has been already added to Civilization would not yet exist, and perhaps never would, just as without a certain grouping of circumstances the artistic florescence of the Renaissance might never have bloomed.

When we look for what belongs properly to America we must not comprise in her part what belongs to the English race, nor, I will add, to other races forming the American nationality, although in the leading part played by this country one cannot yet well discern the influence of any race but the one from which it origi-

nally proceeded. All that belongs to the natural evolution of the Anglo-Saxon civilization should not be ascribed to America only. A fruit is not special to a tree, because it ripens earlier on it in some part of the world. Fruits really American are those which are only produced by American trees, whether in their own Continent or transplanted abroad, although I would not hesitate in calling American the fruits of those European trees which in their native soil are meagre and undeveloped and which acquire in the American soil a much stronger sap.

Having that in view, I would not, for instance, count as an American contribution to Civilization manhood suffrage. It cannot be said that England, or the world, depended at all on the United States for the conception and the development of manhood suffrage. Universal suffrage is not even associated generally with America; it is rather associated with France. Nor would I count Arbitration. I do not think Arbitration was born in this country. Peace proselytizing is more the interest of nations threatened by war than of one protected against it. In the last years there has been a strong Peace movement in America, but it has followed the European Peace movement. Europe, being the Continent threatened by war, needs a greater activity for peace.

But President Eliot, in summing up his Address, refers to that contribution in other words, as *peace keeping*. Expressed like that, I have no doubt it was one of your mightiest contributions to Civilization, because the peace pressure from America on Europe is the greatest pressure weighing on the world to keep down war. America, thanks to the Monroe Doctrine, is the Continent of Peace, and this colossal Peace unit, inter-

esting deeply other regions of the Earth,—the whole Pacific, one could say,—forms a Neutral Hemisphere and balances the other hemisphere, which we might call the Belligerent Hemisphere. How truly prophetic was the boast of Canning about his work, which was that of Monroe also: "I called into existence a new world, to redress the balance of the old." The United States without the Monroe Doctrine would not have redressed it.

Still, we must remember that wars have generally come from obstacles to national aggrandizement, and that yours never met with any serious obstacle. You are carrying out now, thanks to the confidence in your neutral character, as well as to your prestige, a work that would be resisted, as one nation's concern, by the other Sea-Powers, if undertaken by any other nation. With your prodigious growth, your Peace sentiment will have to be tested, when your national aggrandizement meets with the first serious obstacle. The question is if you then would not proclaim the holy national war. As yet no one could say that Peace is a permanent article of faith with you, such as are democracy and religious toleration, for instance. The great fortune of mankind is that the period of your unopposed growth, permitting you to live in peace and to exercise your great moral and commercial pressure for peace, coincides with the time when the progress of civilization and probably that of Science also will succeed in substituting International Law to War, or in detaching War from International Law, of which it makes yet the principal part.

Allow me to say that I believe that nothing would do more to fix on the mind of this great nation the purpose of peace than Pan-Americanism. Once Pan-

Americanism made her determined foreign policy, as it was already, with the Monroe Doctrine, a reflex movement of hers, not only she would wed herself to peace, but she would also wed to it the rest of the Continent, and that task would fill the time still necessary for mankind to disavow war. Peace and Pan-Americanism are convertible terms for you and for us. But, as what gives the greatest strength to your power for peace is immigration, I would classify immigration as the greatest of all contributions of America to Civilization.

Allow me a few remarks on this point. You are a nation in some respects of a unique type. The only one approaching that type was the Roman Empire, when near dissolution. Every other nation is, or was, composed of a race, or of separate races, speaking each its own language; you are a nation formed by the fusion of races of different languages, brought, by superior inducements, to speak only the hereditary language of the Country. In other words, you are a nation formed of nations by their own will. Here lies all the difference: you are formed by free immigration, not by conquest. America is really the New-Europe; but, while the old Europe keeps its race barriers by a different patriotism, different national traditions, and different languages, here in New-Europe all those same European races mingle, intermarry, lose memory of their old allegiances, change the old European soul for the new American one, and, as this fusion takes place by millions of people, you are a nation whose ethnical formula varies at every generation. The racial components of your nationality change so rapidly their relative proportions that one could never say how they really stand to each other. Fortunately, your national conscience has not to adjust itself to the Census; it does

not wait for the analysis of the race; it contents itself with the unalterable synthesis, which is: *American*.

Strange to say, it is this ever-changing ethnical composition that keeps up your individuality, as this one consists more than anything else of the spirit breathed on you at your creation, and the new accessions, wherever they hail from, assimilate eagerly and proudly that spirit as their chief birthright. With the constant influx of newcomers, the useless, inert or decayed, national residuum does not appear so much as it would if there were no new elements to make up for the waste. There is, indeed, in every society a sediment, formed of those parts in which the primitive national spirit was burnt out, at least partly, and which by themselves would not be fit to preserve and to continue the country's individuality. Any aristocracy in America would be a sediment of that kind. I do not mean that fine patina of time, which by figuration we call "aristocracy." In this sense time everywhere is naturally aristocratic.

There have been nations formed by conquest and composed also of different races, but among the latter particularism was always predominant, and they were kept indefinitely apart from each other. When the ancient world was reduced to Roman Provinces, and after Caracalla had extended the right of citizenship to all the free inhabitants of the empire, the world saw a community in the style of yours, all its members claiming, through pride, the same nationality; but those were times of great dissension, and, besides, the fusion of the different races could not proceed so unimpeded as with you, owing to the many barriers of ancient local life.

This is the first and greatest influence I would point

out of the discovery of America on Civilization: the appearance on earth of an immense continent destined to be the new home of the old European races, where they would meet and mix and speak the same language, while their old stocks would grow in the native soil separated and up to now belligerent. In other words, a fact never seen or imagined before, of a mankind, as this is a new mankind, formed by self-selection.

The American Nation was created by the sentiment of country; it was devotion to the native country, together with the feeling of freedom and independence, that led the Colonists to break their ties with the old mother-country. But American Democracy, which from the beginning gave to the pride of country a greater force, has grown to its present size by the voluntary change of their national allegiance in millions. Choosing one's own country is a right that would not be generally acknowledged before this country created it and made it acceptable to the world.

Before the American spirit started immigration, the greatest human migration was the slave-trade, the covering of America by man-stealth with African slaves. The contrast between immigration and the slave-trade is enough to show what a regenerating part the American spirit has had in the march of civilization. No page certainly is more brilliant in the whole history of England than her fight against the African slave-trade, when America was willingly filling with those of the kidnapped negroes who were not thrown overboard; but, after all, what killed the slave-trade and slavery was Immigration. Immigration, not slavery, represents the true American sap. Although Europe had nobly rid herself of slavery, thanks to Christianity, slavery was her colonial policy; in the

New World slavery marked the period of European Colonization and continued as a legacy from the Colonial times after the Independence. Immigration, on the contrary, is characteristically American; the attraction of free, wide and growing America on the dense human layers of Europe. That attraction broke in Europe the old stratifications; created centrifugal forces. For the first time in history, immigration gave men and women of all nationalities a chance of transplantation, of trying life in more favorable circumstances; it destroyed what remained of a dungeon-like character in the old national barriers, by making Country a wholly voluntary allegiance; in a word, it upset forever the foundations of despotism, of practical serfdom, by rendering the people everywhere free to move away from it. I consider Immigration the greatest force in modern Civilization, and no doubt it is an American force.

After Immigration I would name Democracy. Democracy is also distinctly American. Although an English growth in America, it is different from the European growth, and has long reacted against the monarchical spirit of the English race. American history is kingless, as European history is royal. The spirit of liberty, which was characteristically Anglo-Saxon, growing on a land without any monarchical tradition, took the form of Democracy, or Republic. Certainly there are elements fundamentally English in the American Democracy, as there are others that are Greco-Latin. One cannot break the chain that binds through history the evolution of an idea or of a sentiment, but the American Democracy is genuinely new, a new design; the ancients did not produce it, nor would Europe have produced it. So you can claim it for America as a contribution to civilization, not be-

cause the Republican Government could be called a higher form of Civilization than the Monarchical Parliamentary Government, but because, by its competition and by the silent lesson of immigration, it has exercised the most beneficent influence on the liberal evolution of the Monarchical Government in Europe. You can claim that you transformed with your Democracy not only the Monarchical system of Europe, but her colonial methods of Government as well. Democracy has a character of finality which Monarchy has not, even expunged of all spirit of divine right, although the final form of Democracy may yet be the government of the best man, as was the Greek Ideal.

Some pretend, like Prof. Münsterberg in his criticism of President Eliot's Address, that your democracy came from Europe, from the Philosophy of the XVIIIth Century. But the inspiration of that Philosophy, as far as liberty is concerned, went largely there from the New World. Nothing actuated more on Jean Jacques Rousseau than the impression of the New World. The French utopists of the XVIIIth Century did not take much from the discovery of India, China and Japan; but the discovery of America was a creative impression for them, as during three centuries it was for their predecessors. Not a lesser mind than Montaigne, for instance, will say of the American natives, writing in the XVIth Century: "I regret that Lycurgus and Plato have not known them, as it seems to me that what we see by experience among those nations not only surpasses all the pictures with which poetry has embellished the Golden Age, and all its inventions in imagining a happy kind of men, but also the conception and even the wish of Philosophy. . . . How distant from this perfec-

tion would Plato find his Republic!" (Liv. I Chap., XXXI.) The whole *Social Contract* of Rousseau would hold in this chapter of the *Essays*, two centuries older. It is a permanent and growing impression of centuries that which the free-born New World produced on the European mind, only to be replaced by the other commanding, and also constantly growing impression, of the American Democracy, after your independence. A book could be written on those two successive influences of the New World on the European imagination.

Another very great contribution which I would like to mention is the equality of social conditions among all classes of the nation. That is what struck most Alexis de Tocqueville. "When I survey," he wrote, "this countless multitude of beings shaped in each other's likeness, amidst whom nothing rises and nothing falls, the sight of such universal uniformity saddens and chills me." But this fragment does not do justice to his feelings, as he ends by paying homage to the great principle of equality. The fact that Tocqueville ends his survey of America as he had begun it shows that the greatest impression produced on him was *the general equality of conditions*. That is the greatest impression it will produce on anyone. This is the explanation why it has become the adoptive country, the elected home of men of all races, born and reared under the contrary principle of inequality. Just as Asia had the castes, Europe had the orders or classes. In America there is not between the different calls of life any difference of level, and this simple idea, this true social egg of Columbus, has made the success of this nation, transforming it from a people of one single stem, as it begun, into a people of many stems, all

giving the same fruit. But equality did not make only the success of this nation; it fixed the final type of human society everywhere. Like immigration, like democracy, equality is final, and finality is in everything the greatest possible contribution to progress.

For many people the idea of civilization will always correspond to the greatest development of Art. But from the aesthetic point of view, there is no such thing as Progress in the modern world, because if some Arts advanced, others, on the contrary, retroceded. To put it in one single remark, the many countries round the Mediterranean, the Ionian and the *Ægean* seas must have all presented an incomparably more beautiful sight in the days of Hadrian, or of Constantine the Great, than in our days; in the same proportion, at least, as the Greece described by Pausanias to the Greece of Baedeker. You must not look for human progress in Art. In Art let us be retrogrades, of the times of Phidias, of Evainetos, of Vinci, of Beethoven. And as in Art, in Poetry. Poetry will never more equal Mythology. There is yet more poetry in the piece of land which the last earthquake of Messina has convulsed than in all the rest of the world, present or future. To renew the supply of poetry of the earth it is necessary nothing less than the communication with some other planet. That would indeed be a renewal of man's imagination, infinitely greater than was the very great one, of the discovery of America.

Yes, if I were asked of what good America was to Europe, I would say that Columbus cut large doors and windows on the west side of the old European manor, which received its ventilation only from the East. America has regenerated the Old World since the

XVIth Century as effectually as the influx from Central Europe regenerated it in the Middle Ages. The pity was that the means of navigation were not greater in the time of the Roman Empire and that the discovery was not made then, so as to have preserved the ancient Civilization.

But with regard to Art, there is no doubt that there is a distinct American trait. While the English is solid and the French graceful, yours is clean-cut. There is an American perfection, as characteristic as the Japanese, which I believe is well defined by the word *clean-cut*.

Civilization should be essentially the improvement of the social condition of mankind, but we had better call Civilization the increase of the intellectual power of man, as the increase of the intellectual power could alone lead to a permanent satisfactory social condition; that is, to a condition based on truth and trusted entirely to freedom. I do not believe that America is yet leading in the increase of the intellectual power of man, that is, of Science; but I believe that it is already leading in the improvement of man's social condition, I do not say alone, but with a few other Nations, which look chiefly to you.

The idea of Civilization has been up to now associated with individual initiative; in land property, with the system of small estates, more than with the *latifundia*; in trade and industry, more with competition than with concentration. But there is evidently now in progress an evolution, in the sense of unification, that can be called American. Great nationalities, cosmopolitan trains, fast boats, aeroplanes, cables, wireless telegraph, Hague Conferences, all seem to announce that the new tendency of mankind, in every direction,

is the "merger." In theory, centralization seems to assure the better service of so many millions of people, just as the cold storage assures their better feeding, by saving incalculable quantities of food which formerly would decay in the same day; but there are too many points to be considered in centralization, political and social, and only experience will shed any light over them. For the moment no one can say if the new American Political Economy is or not one of the great contributions of this country to Civilization. The Universities of America are watch-towers admirably prepared to follow the progress of the economical evolution and to solve in time the riddle of the Sphinx. One thing is sure: the Age of Franklin will not end as the Age of Midas.

How not to mention among your greatest contributions to mankind your system of Education? The American education seems the only one that is not wholly conventional, that is not a pure galvanization of states of mind of other ages, of the ideals of men who feed their mind and their heart on books, instead of feeding them on the sights and wants of their own times. You alone give as the greatest of all human teachings, self-reliance. And, new to mankind, you teach self-reliance not only to men, but to women. There never existed in the world such a youth of both sexes with the same training for life. You plunge them, since the childhood, in a bath that gives to both the strength and the elasticity of the steel. You have changed the rhythm of life; you write it in quick tempo, and the world is catching from you the spirit of rapid transformation, and is writing it also in the American *prestissimo* instead of the old *adagio*.

Among your great contributions to Civilization President Eliot rightly counts your great inventions; still, as Science is universal, inventions are generally suggestions or perfectionments of the work of other people, and those achieved by you would certainly come out sooner or later with the progress of Science. What has come from you, in opposition to the general modern tendency, is your respect for woman, the place you made for her in mankind, together with the strong current of pure thought, which you oppose to the literature of sensualism flourishing among other races. Certainly Asceticism, in the monastic times, and Chivalry, in the Middle Ages, show well enough that Europe is capable of engendering the strongest currents of purity; even yours is probably only a survival of English Puritanism, kept alive under more favorable conditions; but, with regard to purity of thought towards woman, the present leadership of the world belongs indeed to America.

Gentlemen, I did not intend mentioning all the contributions of this country to Civilization. Their complete catalogue would be a most gigantic task; it would certainly comprise your great contributions to International Law. I only meant to give you a few impressions on the usefulness of America beyond tobacco.

Here is how an English observer, who, with A. de Tocqueville, will remain one of the two Classics of the XIXth Century on American Democracy, the Right Honorable James Bryce, portrays the American people. I only put together the different features he traced of you. According to him, you are a good-natured, a kindly, a humorous, a hopeful, an educated, a moral and a well-conducted people; your average of temperance, chastity, truthfulness and general probity

is somewhat higher than in any of the great nations of Europe; you are a religious people; everything among you tends to make the individual independent and self-reliant; you are a busy people, and a commercial people; you are impressionable, capable of an ideality surpassing that of Englishmen or Frenchmen; you are an unsettled people, nobody feeling rooted to the soil, yet an associative and a sympathetic people; you are a changeful people, but not a fickle one, only growing warm suddenly and cooling as suddenly; you are a conservative people, prosperity serving to make you more so. (AMERICAN COMMONWEALTH, Part IV, Chap. LXXX.) In a word, he says, summing up his whole work: "America marks the highest level not only of material well-being, but of intelligence and happiness, which the race has yet attained." I think such a portrait in the gallery of Nations, even were some of its touches overflattering, which I do not think, is in itself a contribution to Civilization. After it a remark seems necessary.

Until now no European race has given in America exactly the same intellectual fruit as in their native soil, just as the French grapevines transplanted here will never give the same exquisite wines. There is no sign that intellectual hegemony is passing from Europe to America. Europe has not begun to decay, and we must remember that the forming of new ideals, like Christianity, for instance, was many times the work of ages of decay, just as with certain fruits is the spread of seeds. America could not carry out the same work as Europe. There is an Intellectual Geography as well as there is a Botanical or a Zoological Geography. The intellectual qualities of each leading race are different, and it would diminish the power of effort in this coun-

try, were it ever to feel assured that it had surpassed Europe. There is inspiration in the hope, but the victory itself would be the beginning of retrocession. Mankind must remain greater than any of its parts in all that makes the glory of Civilization, and the children should not surpass the fathers in their lifetime. For many centuries Europe and America will lead together.

Speaking of America, I took all the time the part for the whole and talked only of this Country. It is rather early to speak of the part assigned in History to Latin America. We have not yet been ordered to enter the stage; the plays of God are very long ones; his acts are Ages. Up to now we have done, however, a considerable work of Civilization against great difficulties, and I believe that nowhere could be selected finer types of man and woman than among our different nations. We hope we do honor to our native stocks and that we show, compared to them, traits of the same evolution as you present compared to the English race. Many ideals in the world are, in part at least, sustained by our faith, without it ever being noticed, owing to our retiredness, but more than once there has been a surprise in the World, when men from Latin America came to the front, as in the last Council of the Vatican or in the Second Hague Conference, or as when Santos-Dumont, flying around Paris, opened the era of aërial navigation. Sometimes we appropriate the progress of Civilization in a manner that they from whom it originated find too thorough for themselves. No Constitution, for instance, except that of Brazil, disposes that war will only be authorized by the National Congress in case of Arbitration being impossible (Art. 34, paragraph 11), and no other contains such article as its Article 88:

“The United States of Brazil, in no case, will enter into a war of conquest, either directly or indirectly, either alone or allied to another Power.” (Art. 88, Const. of the 24 Feb., 1891.) Likewise, the abolition of war for debt will be in International Law a laurel surrounding the name of the Argentine Republic. But we feel great pride in recognizing the sons of Washington as the molders of our American Civilization.

Gentlemen, I thank President Van Hise for the very great honor of asking me to address your University, which stands in the front row of American Universities. I take it as the best sign that the Continental feeling is already firmly rooted in this stronghold of the American individuality.