

How Do We Look to Other Peoples of the World?

Living and working with school people in other lands, an American educator and his family achieve a keener understanding of the far-reaching impact (for good or ill) of our words and actions here at home.

OUR PRESIDENT, our news commentators, and Americans back from foreign lands say to us we should be careful of how we appear to those abroad. The casual American will say, "Well, how do we look to those abroad?" The simple answer is that we look like our movies, our stereotypes, our seeming inability to practice what we preach, our disinterest in what our statesmen tell us, our smugness, our complacency, and the lip service we give to the tenets of democracy. "And this is a crime?" the average American asks. No, not really a crime—treason. Treason to the true American way of life; treason to the cause of free men the world over; treason to the ideology that has proved itself best for all men. If we were not a nation of highly intelligent, literate people, we could blame it on ignorance, but our mass media and compulsory education make us a very informed people. We know the facts but we seemingly are unwilling to accept them.

We forget very easily how we evolved as a democracy. We talk about a shrinking world and world neighbors, but we

still act like the isolationists we once were. We don't try to understand, for example, why Asians fear us, or why we must give support and encouragement to nations having recently received their freedom or nations struggling for freedom. We don't seem to realize that we could help them short-cut their process by sharing with them what we have learned in our own evolving concept of democracy.

Nearly 200 years ago we became dedicated to the proposition that "... all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness." This we believed to be a concept of democracy at the time of our independence. And yet our first president held slaves.

We set about the arduous task of building this great nation of ours. As we moved into the nineteenth century more and more people were beginning to see slaves as human beings. By the middle of that century this democracy of ours was forced to make a decision, so after a Civil War, an Emancipation Proclamation, and three amendments to the Constitution, we gave new meaning to the concept of equality. But a nation does

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not accept a concept as easily as the law is written, so for the next 80 years there was organized resistance. It took many forms, the Ku Klux Klan, the separate but equal concept of the Supreme Court, the inequities in social and economic opportunities for a large segment of the American people. Terms like "America's tenth man" and "second-rate citizen" flowed very glibly from the lips of men.

As We See Ourselves

It was not until World War II that America recognized the need to utilize all of its citizens. The need for manpower at home and abroad made it imperative that we utilize each individual to his utmost. It was necessary to screen the total skilled manpower of America to be sure of having enough fighting men on the war front and enough skilled production men on the home front. Men of all colors and creeds worked and fought side by side to

achieve our major objective. In the period that followed World War II many forces have worked tirelessly to make the American dream a reality. Supreme Court decisions outlawing restrictive covenants, the North's instrument of segregation, and all forms of segregation in interstate transportation, were but two of many.

The sciences and the social sciences have taught us much since the turn of the century. And utilizing what we know now about human beings, the Supreme Court in 1954 rendered its greatest decision, a decree that called for the desegregation of public schools. Editorials throughout the world paid high tribute to America for taking this very forward step. But a year later our newspapers carried headlines, shameful headlines, nullifying most of the good that had been achieved in the earlier announcement.

The author and other American Fulbright team members meet their Central India workshoppers. Dr. Janet Kelley, second from left, author with camera, and Dr. Lorene Fox, second woman from right.

COURTESY THE AUTHOR



There have been many other forces working for good in America. Cities and school systems across the country were creating Human Relations Councils. Organizations like the Anti-Defamation League of B'nai B'rith, the National Conference of Christians and Jews, the National Urban League, the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People, the National Council of Churches, national teacher associations and many more too numerous to mention have been working around the clock to make America, through leadership and example, the symbol of free men throughout the world.

When we look at America we see the free public school, a tested stable government, bountiful natural resources, the opportunity to earn a living, technological advancement, fast diesel drawn trains, well fed children, women treated as equals, Main Street, the American attic, baseball with peanuts and hot dogs, and the freedom to sit by a lazy stream on a warm Sunday afternoon and fish or just dream.

As Others See Us

Lillian Smith¹ says that the Asians and Africans see us differently. They see us as a nation which practices a legal segregation which to them makes us a "White Democracy" and they have had enough of white democracy. She says they see us as the most powerful nation on earth, and Asians and Africans fear power. They have felt its great weight. And further the Asians fear us because we have the hydrogen bomb. They realize that the only atomic bombs ever used were used against them, the Asians. They know that we and the British use Asian waters for our experiments.

¹Lillian E. Smith. *Now Is the Time*. New York: The Viking Press, 1955.

We in America know these fears are unwarranted. And we also know that we must work as hard as we can to correct the ills of our democracy. We know that we must help our boys and girls to understand that people of other lands are not folks who live in quaint little houses and perform rope tricks and other feats of magic, but that they are as real as the family next door, or the folks in the next block. We must encourage international understanding through the exchange of students, classroom teachers, and college professors. We must continue to give encouragement and support to the Fulbright program of our National Government, to the Ford Foundation and its overseas activities, to the Rotary International and its scholarships and other organizations like the Rotary, to the university tours which are increasing annually in number. We must see to it that these people have an opportunity to live with the people and in so living share their feelings and mode of living. Bathe as they bathe, eat the food that they eat, observe the customs these people respect, and if the opportunity presents itself, to try to see their country with them and through their eyes.

Because Indians believed that the sunrise from Tiger Hill in the Himalaya Mountains was the most beautiful in the world, I saw it as the most beautiful. When they said that the Ajanta and the Alora caves were the most magnificent in the world, I saw them as the most magnificent in the world. I stood inside them and gazed in awe and wonderment. I saw these huge but lovely temples hewn from natural rock and painted with frescos surpassing even those of the Italian painters of the Renaissance. I strolled through the ruins of civilizations past and heard the stories from their lips

and lived again the history, love and life of these great people.

I saw this nation as her people see it. I walked with these people through the ruins of their ancient civilization, but I also worked with them as they went about building a new one. I also saw mingled with the beauty of Ceylon and Singapore and Saigon and Manila and Hongkong and Tokyo the struggles of peoples recently set free or those hoping for freedom in the near future.

But through all this I thought America no less great. Just as I thought her no less great when I looked down upon the quilted green of the Emerald Isle, or when I stood in the shadow of the Tower of London, or when I looked upon the blue Mediterranean of South France or as I stood in the majestic quiet of the Colosseum of old Rome. I still had my respect and love for America when I looked down on old Athens and the beauty of Lebanon and the far stretches of mountains and valleys that represented the cradle of Christianity.

Actions—and Effect

In the recent year my family and I spent abroad we witnessed the universality of human emotion. We saw the joy of the wedding in London, the tears of sorrow on the face of the man in India who had lost a son, the light of love shining from the faces of two oriental young adults, the anger engendered when an American film offended African students. We discovered what we should have known. That even a nation facing a crisis continues the natural patterns for survival. That life is never so abundant that it becomes cheap and of little consequence. That love between two people cannot be entirely controlled by custom, and that people the world over want respect and resent offensiveness. We also

The author greets his Indian friends.



COURTESY THE AUTHOR

witnessed the world acceptance of the oneness of God. We met people of high principle and of good moral fibre who worshipped differently than we. We lived in a nation whose people we once labeled as heathen, who now in their independence have adopted a constitution that is a carbon copy of our own. A constitution designed to guarantee all of the freedoms that the American Constitution guarantees to its people.

President Eisenhower went before the American people at the time of the Little Rock incident and stated that the world has its eyes upon us and the editor of a midwestern newspaper published the letter from an American² visiting in Kingston, British West Indies, which said:

Most of the time I am proud to be an American. Today I am ashamed. On opening the morning paper here in Kingston, Jamaica, I found our country's disgrace spread across the front page of *The Daily Gleaner*. "What kind of people are these," they asked me, "who send armed soldiers against school children, who beat up ministers, who bomb churches and schools?" These are difficult questions to answer. As an American I can only continue to have faith that our problems will be solved with justice and humanity. However, whatever the outcome I can't help feeling that we have suffered a loss of respect in the eyes of the world. Like Americans everywhere I am embarrassed and saddened by what is taking place in our country today.

Well did I understand what President

²"Letter to the Editor," by Mrs. Lola M. Gibson, the *Flint Journal*, Flint, Michigan.

Eisenhower and this young American were saying. For example, my wife and I sat in a restaurant in Tokyo that was owned by an American and his Japanese wife. They came to our table and visited with us and asked us how things were in America. We were in the process of telling them of our progress when the young man pulled from his billfold a clipping from a Tokyo newspaper with a date line "Detroit" which described an aged couple who had bought a home and were asked to move because it was believed they were Negro. Our young friends asked us if this was what we meant. Needless to say, we were embarrassed.

I was in India at the time Nat King Cole was beaten up on a stage in Birmingham, Alabama. I read of it the next day. I was in India at the time Miss Lucy was denied admission to the University of Alabama. I read the account blow by blow. I was also in India at the time of the murder of the little Till boy in Mississippi, and I was there when the Montgomery boycott began, and remember the Indian paper with banner headlines which said "American Negroes Use Gandhi Methods of Passive Resistance." These accounts were not "doctored up" editorials or articles created in the minds of staff members in some Calcutta press. They were the AP and UP releases from the American papers. The pictures I saw were the same pictures that Americans saw in their papers. Not only did I read of the concerns of America but I read also of the concerns of the natives and coloreds of South Africa, the struggles of Morocco, the confusion caused by language difficulties in Ceylon, the attempt at independence for Singapore, the problems of Malaya, and of the coming election in Japan.

At a time when these nations need

guidance and assistance in their problems of gaining their freedom or strengthening their newly achieved freedom it is unfortunate that we, the greatest of democracies, must show so much evidence of weakness. Most Americans are aware of our weakness and many have expressed it. Here is an editorial from one of our American papers.³

It is unimportant what the Russians think of us, or what we think of the Russians. What is important, however, is what the still uncommitted peoples of the world think of us. The millions of dark skinned people of Asia and Africa who are weighing communism against democracy and trying to decide between them. That is why so much concern is being expressed over the impact of the integration controversy abroad.

And these words of one of our governors:

If we accomplish here at home an end to this evil moral sickness of discrimination we then need have no fear of the outcome of our fight with the forces of communism in the world area.

Former President Truman speaking recently as a private citizen said:

We can't have one face at home and another abroad. Our own solution to our problems will do more than all the money we can spend abroad.

May we once more remind ourselves that for 181 years the American ideal of democracy has evolved until today we have brought it to mean that no man is less than another, that neither race, color, creed, nor national origin is a deterrent to full citizenship and happiness. This we have decreed through the edicts of our courts and now we need only to decree this from the depths of our hearts. We must sincerely believe we are not superior to others because of the accident of birth. We must be willing to examine ourselves in the light of what

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³ Editorial comment from the *Flint Journal*, Flint, Michigan.

sian education which do not support a particular thesis the writer wishes to develop.

While the facts presented in this report by the U. S. Office of Education do show that the Soviet student gets more mathematics and science instruction than the American student, that he is also far more serious about his studies, and that, for the purpose it serves, Soviet education is effective, yet a careful reader will also note that the Russians have their educational problems, too. Schools in outlying regions are inferior to those in cities; ten per cent of the students fail and have to repeat the work; outbursts of hooliganism and other forms of juvenile delinquency do occur; and complaints are heard that too many engineers are being trained but not enough technicians.

Some of the facts cited in the volume will have important implications for people, both lay and professional, who want to improve our own educational system;

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science and social science have proved to us. We must use well the intelligence with which we have been endowed. We must not anger and strike out blindly when a mirror is held up for us to take a good look at ourselves as individuals or as a nation. We must cease to get strength from name-calling and stereotype stories which hurt the feelings of

for example, the teacher-pupil ratio in the USSR is 17 to 1; salaries and prestige of teachers are very high; and a greater percentage of the national income than in the United States goes for educational purposes. Perhaps the most significant of the statements in the report is the following value judgment: "Soviet students lack the encouragement given to American students to freely develop critical faculties, learn to differentiate among opposing points of view, and make up their own minds on controversial questions."

For a source of information on the organization, curriculum, financing and administration of the Soviet educational system this report is very valuable. But it is largely a statistical report and does need to be supplemented with other materials of a more interpretative and philosophical nature.

—Reviewed by ROBERT G. RISINGER,
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others. We must cease from using such tricks and subtleties as "gentlemen's agreements" and gerrymandering. For only after we have rid ourselves of these negative aspects can we expect to be a true example for the other nations of the world who are searching for the ideology that will give rights, responsibility and dignity to each individual and each nation.

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