

CULTURAL AND SOCIAL FACTORS IN  
NATIONAL STRENGTH: THE U.S.

19 November 1958

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INDUSTRIAL COLLEGE OF THE ARMED FORCES

Washington, D. C.

Dr. David Riesman, Henry Ford, II Professor of Social Sciences at Harvard University, was born in Philadelphia in 1909, educated at William Penn Charter School there, and at Harvard College and Harvard Law School from which he graduated in 1934. After a year of research at Harvard on problems of Government and law, he was secretary to Mr. Justice Brandeis of The United States Supreme Court during the 1935-1936 term of the Court, and then practiced law in Boston with Lyne, Woodworth and Evarts. In 1937 he became Professor of Law at the University of Buffalo, and during World War II after a year as Deputy Assistant District Attorney of New York County, he became Assistant to the Treasurer and War Contract Termination Director of Sperry Gyroscope Company. Since 1946 he has held teaching and research appointments at Chicago, Yale, and Johns Hopkins Universities. He came to Harvard from the University of Chicago where he was a member of the Department of Sociology, in the fall of 1958. His most recent book is "Constraint and Variety in American Education"; earlier works include "The Lonely Crowd," "Thorstein Veblen: A Critical Interpretation," and "Individualism Reconsidered." This is Dr. Riesman's first appearance at the Industrial College.

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CAPTAIN POWELL: Today we are going to examine the relationship of cultural and social structures to national unity and strength in the United States.

In the study of human resources we must go far deeper than a statistical count of the number of persons quantity- and quality-wise. We must understand our cultural backgrounds, for it is here that we find the strengths and weaknesses which have an impact on our national unity and strength.

We are indeed fortunate today to have with us another top authority in the field of social science. Our speaker is Professor of Social Sciences at Harvard University. Prior to his coming to Harvard, he held teaching and research appointments at Chicago, Yale, and Johns Hopkins Universities. He started his career in law, and later turned to the field of the social sciences. He has become a leading educator, is an author of many books and articles, and I must say that he is one of the most searching and brilliant analysts of American culture in the United States.

Dr. Riesman, it gives me great pleasure to welcome you to the Industrial College and present you to the Class of 1959. Dr. Riesman.

DR. RIESMAN: Thank you, Captain Powell.

Members and Friends of the Industrial College: I have had difficulty with my enormous assignment. I first wrote a speech and then I didn't like it; but I'm perfectly glad to distribute it if that would add to the backlog of your discussion.

I want to deal with my topic, not only by saying what some of the assets of America are, but also by emphasizing some of the liabilities underlying those same assets, as well as by pointing to the uneven spread of those assets. But, first, I think I should apply that method of reasoning to myself and to say, in addition to Captain Powell's generous comments, what some of my own assets and liabilities are for discussing this topic.

The United States is not a small primitive tribe on an island, and applying to this country, as to any large, heterogeneous nation, some of the concepts of cultural anthropology (which I understand my colleague, Professor Kluckhohn, discussed yesterday), raises problems of scale--problems which have not been resolved by social scientists and remain controversial. I'm a reasonably unspecialized student of American history and institutions, employing as best I can a kind of cross-cultural perspective, but handicapped by lack of experience with other cultures than our own; and, as any of us must be, by the limited range of my own experiences as an American.

I would not tackle such a topic if I did not have the American assets of confidence and optimism. In this I think I'm like some of the officers who run the college here, who are willing to shift from, let us say, the Bureau of Ships or the SAC to doing something quite different, with confidence that they can manage. I would not have shifted from teaching law to the relatively new areas of social science if I were not taking advantage of what is quite uniquely American--incomprehensible to many Europeans: the opportunity to change jobs in midcareer.

I am a student of trends in America. In my work I use all the data that I can find, which more systematic students have organized, ranging from public opinion polls to studies of popular fiction, and to occasions to meet with such a group as this. But studying trends does not mean bowing to them; and my judgment of the American potential has not been stable. And I come to you at the moment when I am even less confident about the American future than I usually am: if some of you think me pessimistic, that is right.

Now, the assets that I want to discuss, as I have already implied, include: American confidence and optimism; a lack of caste barriers and formal groupings, which makes America a fluid society in comparison with others; and ease in organizing groups--what I shall call in this talk Americans' "organizational literacy." But first the problem of confidence.

It is characteristically American, as distinguished from the rest of the world, to believe that problems are soluble. One of the very striking manifestations of this came at the very beginning of the national experience, when the Puritans seemed to believe that their faith rested in the hands of an angry God, and yet at the same time came to think that they

could, in a sense, forstall His verdict; that if they were successful and respected in the community, this was a sign in Calvinist terms of their election--that they were saved. And so a creed which looks like a fatalistic one, which looks as if it said to men, "What can you do anyway? God will decide, in fact, has already decided long ago," turned out to be a creed which gave them as Americans unusual energy and the determination, so to speak, to force a favorable verdict from God.

Indeed, we can see that other deterministic beliefs, including Marxism, which I understand you have been discussing in other aspects of your work, have this same paradoxical quality--that a creed which says it is all foreordained may nevertheless, for psychological reasons, force men into energetic activity. So it was with Calvinism in America.

In any event, Americans were selected from the more energetic people in Europe, the people who had the gumption to move, who had the hope that they might better their lot by moving. The same has been true of those more American Americans who moved west and continued to move west throughout our history. They moved west because there was hope that one could do better in the West. The West, of course, receded, and so did the hope; but then one moved again. In fact, we see this with people changing jobs all the time--that they hope that the next job will be better; and the people who move to one job are also those likely to move to another.

In fact, the problems were in a sense soluble. What seemed a wilderness, inhabited by hostile Indian tribes, or at least incomprehensible ones, a wilderness without gold and silver, turned out to be a Utopia for the rest of the world; and to the eyes of Europe, and, indeed, the planet, America is a success story. In spite of the Civil War, there has been a relative stability of institutions in this country, longer than in most democracies. In terms also of unifying an enormously heterogeneous population, drawn from all quarters of Europe, there has been success. The creed of Americanism is in a sense a creed of success; that it works.

To all this, and, indeed, to much of my account, the South is a notable exception. As Vann Woodward, the Johns Hopkins historian of the South, points out, the jaunty optimism of America has generally not been true in the South, although that is changing now.

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Moreover, it was easy to link one's individual career of success to the American success story at large. I have recently been reading a community study done in a small town in the state of Washington. People are not wealthy in that town. They lead a life which combines farming and working in the lumber industry. But they work with up-to-date machinery, not only in their farming and lumbering, but in their homes, where they have dishwashers and all the other appliances. They still connect in this way with both the great American success story and with the minor-league movement "upwards" in their own lives from humble origins. Hence, the confidence of Americans comes both from the national theme and from their own experiences of movement, of bettering themselves, occupationally and materially, as so many Americans can.

I have already indicated some limit on this by reference to the South, which has not been an affluent society, but has been poor, and has not been a success, having lost a big war and many minor struggles since the Civil War. But also the working class--what there is of it in America; and I don't mean workers as such I mean people who are specifically of working-class outlook--do not share the American success orientation. They are fatalistic. They believe, for instance, as is shown in many public opinion polls, that there will always be wars, that things will grow worse rather than better, that people can't be trusted, and that "they," those far-off people who manage events in Washington and so on, are malign.

The more energetic people, who came from this working class or lower class background, are drained off from it by education, or by entering a small business, or perhaps by becoming a union leader. So there always remains a sediment, so to speak, at the bottom of our society which does not share what we might now refer to as the general middle class values of optimism and confidence.

There is another group that does not share them, namely, older people. This is still a youth-centered culture. There is still hope in being young. There is still glamour in being young. But people who have retired, people living, as perhaps some of you will live, on pensions in an age of inflation--they are not optimistic. They are not confident. In the polls they always show up as thinking things will get worse rather than better. They are punished by being old in a country that does not value age or experience, but values the ability to innovate, and the bouncy and jaunty confidence that goes with it.

Then, too, the Negroes, most of them working class, do not in general share American optimism, although many as a rising group do share it; and these are more "American" even than most Americans. And we can say that many minority groups in this country have a history of fatalism--Sicilian peasant fatalism, Greek fatalism--which they are slow to shake off on the American scene.

Indeed, there are parts of the country where it is the old Americans, the original founding groups, the descendants of those groups, who feel like a minority group and feel their values threatened, and therefore do not feel confident about the future.

But one must ask whether beyond these enclaves of doubt there is in this country a more general loss of optimism. If one goes back 100 years or more ago, one finds in Connecticut, in Ohio, in the new State of Iowa, many missionary societies, where women gathered to raise money to send someone to convert the Chinese to the American way of life as well as to Christianity. The people who did that had a boundless confidence that there was only one good way of life, which was the American way. And when the first American missionaries went to Hawaii about 1820, they brought with them what would now be a UNESCO team: they had a doctor, a teacher, a man who would teach better farming practices, a mechanic to teach them how to make ploughs, and so on, as well as ministers. All were missionaries, buoyed up in the hope that the American way would spread to the rest of the world--at a time when this was a very small country, when it was presumptuous to imagine that the rest of the world would adopt the way of so small a fraction of it and so new and struggling a fraction. This hope I think is vanishing fast.

As you heard Dr. Kluckhohn yesterday, I think you got a sense of how low in the scale of anthropological values stands the missionary spirit today, how little that ethnocentric belief that only one way is the right one has credit in the social sciences; how much Americans today, if they're at all educated, are inclined to feel that maybe other ways of life are at least right for "them," for those other people. And the easy assumption of American cultural and technical superiority of 100 years ago is less widespread today, when there is actually more superiority in comparison with the very underdeveloped country that America was at the beginning of the 19th century.

(Indeed, if we go back to the beginning of that century and look at it in terms of what we now know about Americans, we find that the optimism

and confidence, which so struck visitors from Europe, had underneath it always a certain streak of despair. This streak, of course, was strong in Calvinism, in spite of the optimism to which Calvinism led. It was strong in the evangelical revivals of the last century. It was strong in the thought of the South. And one often feels, as one goes back to an earlier and more buoyant America, that this confidence too had a kind of, well, "hysterical" is too strong a word, but a certain vehemence which denied an underlying misgiving. If, for instance, we read Mark Twain today, and read, let us say, one after the other "A Connecticut Yankee in King Arthur's Court" and "Huck Finn," we see that this man's view of man was a very sardonic one; and that if he thought the Connecticut Yankee was superior to the feudal lord, he certainly didn't think much of the Connecticut Yankee either.)

And if this is true of American feeling about the state of the Nation, it is also true about the hopes for personal success. All sorts of studies indicate that American young people are no longer so hellbent for achievement as they may once have been; that they no longer think it is worth it. Or perhaps, to put it in another way, young people today have more complex goals than they once did. It is not enough to get into a position of responsibility. In fact, when one reads a book like "The Man in the Gray Flannel Suit," one finds an option for the comfortable suburban life in the family as against the strenuous life in the big city. Happiness is defined in a more differentiated way. It is defined in terms of families, in terms of personal relations, in terms of meaning, rather than in terms of the obvious marks of success.

And if we take these two things together--the American loss of confidence about the American mission and the individual's loss of confidence in an easy definition of his own mission--we see one reason why America tends to fall in the world into a certain defensive posture, having lost an earlier faith in human perfectability; and I shall come back to that later.

Now, I want to turn, having indicated the strength that confidence gives, the stability to tackle new jobs, the belief that things can be accomplished in the world--a very American notion--and its limitations, and some underlying misgivings about it, to my second major topic, related of course, to what I've said, namely, this fluidity and mobility of American society and what I refer to as organizational literacy.

What I mean by "organizational literacy" is the extraordinary ability of three Americans to form a committee. This is unknown in much of the

world, as those of you who have traveled know. If one looks at a book like Edward Banfield's study of a south Italian village, "The Moral Basis of a Backward Society," one realizes that it is inconceivable to people in this village that they could ever unite for a common goal. Any action that is taken would have to come either from the local landowner, the Catholic Church, the State, or the Communist Party--the only organizations that transcend the village.

In this country this literacy developed early. People came here as religious people, but without an established church. They had to make their own churches: to organize, tax, support their own churches. For instance, Catholics from Poland, coming from a country with an established church given in the landscape, given in the parish boundaries, had in this country to come and find the Irish already here; and if they wanted priests who spoke Polish, they had to get them themselves and start a new parish. In such a fashion, organizational literacy was built into the very pattern of American life.

Organizational literacy commands and depends on other kinds of literacy. If one cannot read, make a speech, handle parliamentary procedure or its rudiments, one is unable to organize in this way. If one can't read the papers, one isn't going to find out about like-minded people with whom one might form a committee.

But there is something else in organizational literacy, namely, the ability to take the role of the other, the ability to play on a team. And a team player is someone who not only knows what the other side is going to do, but what his own team is doing, and is able to empathize with or identify with all the positions on the team, both his own and the other. This identification with the other goes very far in American life. It means, for instance, that American college boys can wait on tables or work on the roads in the summer without feeling a loss of status--something at which a European or an Indian student would marvel. It has been a relatively easy shift in America from blue collar to white collar. And if one has leisure in one's white collar job, one becomes a part-time blue-collar worker in do-it-yourself activities. Likewise, American engineers are famous all over the world for their willingness to get their hands dirty. And I don't know whether you would be struck by this in comparison with Army officers and Navy officers in other countries whom you have contact with, who come from a more caste-like society than ours.

And the ability to empathize with the role of the other includes even relatively disadvantaged groups, so that in America there is a more companionate relation between the sexes, as you know, than, let us say, in Arab countries.

Education, as I have indicated, is one element in organizational literacy. It is not only our major channel for discovering and distributing talent, but also the principal channel for training people, through clubs and interest groups and teams, in the ability to take the role of the other and to organize. Moreover, education serves to take people out of their original parish and to introduce them to a wider and more cosmopolitan world. Poll data show, for instance, that tolerance increases with education; that willingness to trust others increases with education.

But here again there is a limit on the extent of organizational know-how. In the South, which is so often an exception in any generalizations about America, people in the original colonies and States frequently settled quite far apart, in separate plantations; and the town meeting pattern, which developed in New England and spread through Ohio, Indiana, and Illinois, was less available, since people were more scattered. Therefore the South has never had quite as much organizational know-how as New England had. Moreover, at the very top of society, in what remnants there are of an aristocracy in America, there is a small class--perhaps we should call it the playboy class--who do not engage in voluntary organizations. Lloyd Warner's studies, for instance, show that the upper class person expects the person who wants to be upper class to do the work of the community chest, the symphony board, and the many other voluntary organizations, as a method of becoming upper class and therefore free of committees. But this is not by any means a universal pattern. As we can see in the recent election between Rockefeller and Harriman in New York, not all wealthy people have this attitude, although to the American aristocracy, I guess, even Rockefeller and Harriman would be nouveau riche, and hence overactive!

But there is a paradox in the very spread of educational opportunity--education being, as I have indicated, the way in which people are given the various literacies they need for the manifold tasks of American society, including experience in organizational know-how. The paradox is that the very spread of educational opportunity militates against it.

As we all know, the supply of teachers has not kept up with the demand, and the effort to provide higher schooling for the great majority

means in practice that we don't have enough imaginative and inspiring teachers to counteract the home backgrounds of students whose parents do not themselves value education. A school system can lift a few such students into the middle class; however, the very spread of education has moved almost too fast for its general effectiveness. And the democracy of Americans, which makes us ready to take the role of the other, is very much a two-way street. While on the one hand the lower class boy in high school may get interested in his studies and may decide to go to college, in which case he can almost surely make it financially, the middle class boy may decide that the rock and roll set has it better and that it would be better to have an easy life than the more stressful one of the student; and perhaps some of you as parents are not unaware of this.

Yet these residual inequalities and limitations are, in comparison with other societies, small. And it is extraordinary how wide is the middle class orientation in America in which organizational literacy exists, in which people can learn and imagine new ways of doing things, and new ways of taking the role of the other.

Now, I might here make a note on the research-mindedness of Americans as a sort of fluidity and mobility, not only for individuals, but for society as a whole--so much so, that innovation has in some great industries, and perhaps in the armed services, been routinized in research and development departments; and change has been put on the assembly line. Here too there is an uneven spread. Local governments, small business, and academic life have very little research and development; that is, academicians do research but not on the academic itself.

However, this fluidity, this openness, has again its countervailing side. All virtues have their countervailing defect, and in this case the defect is the lack of leadership in America. We are, as you know, an equalitarian society. This leads not only to easy mobility regionally and socially and educationally, but also to a certain fear of eminence. In any group one must always ask, "Who's in charge?" and the answer may be, "Nobody."

There is in any plant the fear of the rate-buster. In the Hawthorn Plant studies, the famous studies at the Western Electric Company, which some of you have no doubt read, it was discovered that workmen restricted production, had, you might say, a G.I. mentality. And some of you

may have seen a paper in the Naval Institute proceedings a few years ago called "Discipline and the Division," in which the writer spoke of the difficulty in the Navy of distinguishing between authority based on privilege and rank and authority based on competence and effectiveness; and how the officer tends to want his men to like him rather than to respect him; and the difficulties this makes for the old-fashioned ideal of naval leadership.

A number of experiments indicate the persuasibility of Americans by group opinion. One of the most striking is the so-called Asch experiment. In that the following procedure is undertaken: A subject, let us say, a student, is brought into a room with five or six strangers, who look like students but are actually stooges of the experimenter. The group is told that this is an experiment in the ability to judge the relative length of lines. Lines are thrown on a board, and one line is obviously longer than another. After a few trials, the experimenter begins in earnest and the student, the subject, discovers that the other people in the room see a shorter line as a longer one. Then he is asked which line is longer. In perhaps a third of the cases he will say that the shorter line is the longer. He will agree with the group.

If then he is asked afterward as to why he did this, one finds a great variety of patterns. Sometimes he actually saw the shorter as the longer line, although, if he were alone, there would be no question about which was longer. Sometimes he saw the longer line as longer, but thought something was wrong with his eyes. Sometimes he saw the longer line as longer, did not think anything was wrong with his eyes, but wanted to be a good fellow. And even if he said the longer line was longer, he felt uncomfortable in departing from the group--the group which seemed to be composed of people like himself. One interesting addendum to this experiment is that if the subject has one other person in the room agreeing with him, he can stand out against 10 or 15 people. That is, if a person has one ally, he can stand against a very large number. But if one is utterly alone, one is very much more likely to be anxious and to be persuaded by the majority.

Today, Americans are worried about this very fact of persuasibility. One result is the great effort to establish one's nonconformity in what often seems like irrelevant ways, like wearing a beard or being particularly unpleasant, so that one flaunts the banner of one's own individuality and thus convinces oneself that one has a character.

This fluidity of Americans has given us a situation in which there are few enclaves in which one's individuality is protected by tradition, by social class, by ethnic or regional difference. But it would not be right to speak of the American tendency to conform as merely based on the wish to be popular, though this accusation is often made. It is also based on what is another great asset of Americans--again in contrast to much of the world--namely, and especially among young people, a great generosity, a great decency, a great concern for others, a great openness.

But there is, too, a lack of a frame of reference--whether in judging the relative length of lines or in more important matters--by which people can guide themselves apart from others. Although Americans are a church-going people, they lack any frame of devotion which takes them outside the group; and church-going often is itself a collegial activity. Knowledge is fragmented--fragmented in academic life by departments, and fragmented in much of our life by what Margaret Mead calls "quiz bits"--the potpourri of items that one gets in the typical news broadcasts. Everything is equal to everything else, not only in terms of individuals being equal, but facts being equal too. Nothing is more important than anything else. I recently saw a Civilian Defense memo which was an effort to make people aware of the perils of the time, but lumped together tornados, floods, and atomic bombs, and said you must be on guard against them all.

Events thus are no longer given meaning by a traditional frame, whether religious or cultural. Individuals have very little to guide them through the maze in terms of their occupational or financial position. If one reads the "Founding Fathers" (as in "The Federalist Papers") one finds them talking about the "agricultural interest" or the "trading interest" or the "landed interest." We have very little of that today. Most of us live in an employee society. Whether our wages are relatively high or relatively unmunificent, we do not have a position given to us by the nature of our social situation, which helps us to frame, and perhaps also to distort, what happens.

And if we are an employee society, we are also, as we all know, a consumer society. Erick Fromm, in his book, "Man for Himself," calls ours a "receptive orientation," in which we receive not only the goods our society turns out--and of course I know I speak to a group which is relatively less well endowed and less in search of those goods than people in

more opulent walks of life--but also in which we receive, as consumers, our politics, our cultural items, and even our emotions.

Consequently, the fluidity of America, so to speak, goes on inside us; and, as we move, we are moved. And as we travel about, we fluctuate in our attachments. One of you said to me a few minutes ago, before we met here, that one of the troubles of being a naval officer is that one's children have no roots. They go to school here, there, and everywhere. But this is only a perhaps slightly exaggerated instance of the general American case: in a society in which the average person moves once in every five years, this would appear to be a general situation. Even if one has not moved, but has stayed in the same place, the other people who have moved into one's neighborhood make it no longer the same place, so that one cannot gain roots simply by staying where one is.

I want to conclude by turning to what seems to me the most complex and perhaps insurmountable liability from which some of the others flow, namely, the lack of collective goals for American life today.

One cannot lead in the group, in the committee, if there is no direction in which one is sure one wants to go. One cannot be independent if there is nothing to be independent for. One cannot be confident unless one can see ahead into a future, which, if not better in obvious respects from the present, is at least no less meaningful and offers hope. But I believe America has run out of goals and run out of meanings. It is a long time since people came to this country, or lived in it, in order to establish the greater glory of God, as the original Puritans did. And, as I say, this is so although Americans today are much more faithful in the sense of church-going than we ever were and than was so at the time of the Revolution.

Likewise, it is no longer a meaningful goal for Americans to master a new continent. We have done that already. The Russians are always talking about catching up with the Americans, but with whom are we catching up? It is to the people in the poorer countries and the Communist countries that the building of railroads and power plants appear a glorious thing to do. That job is largely done here. Wiping up what remains of the residual poverty in American life and remedying the lack of physical resources cannot satisfy the energies of our most sensitive and gifted young people. Indeed, it can well be that you are in your jobs

and I am in mine just because this is so. A generation or two ago we might have found careers in industry and commerce. But it seems to me that free enterprise today exists less in business than in other walks of life.

Even the job of increasing the gross national product, so that there will be more for everyone, including even the armed services, is hardly a sufficient goal. And it is not made into one, in my opinion, by persuading ourselves that we must beat the Communist bloc, necessary or suicidal as we may think that race to be. For it is a static goal, quite different from the sense of a mission, which, as I have indicated, Americans have traditionally had when we were expanding into our own West and sending missionaries to China and Africa.

If we are awake today, we know--and you know too, because you have been working in this field--that the world is in ferment; that there are many revolutionary changes going on; that fear of these and refusal to face them and think about them are a kind of moral isolationism. They inspire in young people not dedication, but tiredness, cynicism, and even despair.

New goals can only come from a new vision, and a meaningful vision for today must embrace more than America. Otherwise people will relapse into their private worlds until shaken out of them by disaster.

And now at this perhaps dramatic point we should stop to continue later in discussion.

CAPTAIN POWELL: Dr. Riesman is ready for your questions.

QUESTION: Sir, after listening to other speeches from this platform and the platform upstairs, it appears to me that this country is dedicated to receiving the first blow in a nuclear war between the Soviet Union and ourselves. Based on your analysis of the American character, do you think the American people capable of standing up and fighting a war after a first and somewhat catastrophic nuclear blow by the Soviet Union?

DR. RIESMAN: I have some familiarity with the so-called disaster studies which have been carried on in this country in an effort to get at least one kind of answer to that question--studies of the consequences of

explosions, tornadoes, et cetera. Here the American confidence has a kind of negative side--doesn't it?--namely, that Americans are accustomed to things going well and when things do not go well, the bottom drops out. If the committee can be reconstituted, if people can get organized, if there is local leadership, much can be done.

But that doesn't really answer your question, for it seems to me that in the world we live in it's an unrealistic vision, and in fact a hopeless one. If this happens, the whole world would seem to me more likely to blow up and none of us be around, at least in the civilized or developed parts of the world, to raise such questions.

I would say also this: Social science has its own Calvinism, its own streak of determinism, of predestination; and I must always guard against this. The studies may show that hopelessness and despair would come from defeat in a country which, except again for the South, has not known defeat and is therefore morally and psychologically unprepared for it; but the inventiveness of people, their ability to prove wrong the prophets both of hope and despair, must never be underestimated. Something new can always turn up in man. In fact, if I didn't think that, I would be even more pessimistic than I am.

QUESTION: Doctor, do you think that the moral fiber of this country has gone downhill as a result of no apparent definite aims? I gather from your talk that we don't apparently have any place to go in this country and that this is some impediment to our ability to go ahead.

DR. RIESMAN: I think the older generation, to which both of us belong, is likely to keep its moral fiber and look at the young with somewhat uneasy eyes in this respect because they don't share our version of it. I think for the world for which many of you are preparing this is understandable, because the moral fiber necessary in a conflict, to go back to the first question, in the hazardous situation, is not as noticeable among the young who have grown up in a settled country as among their ancestors who came here under great hardships, settled the West, and so on.

There are other kinds of morality among today's young people, however, which in another kind of world would come into their own. As indicated before, the generosity and decency of Americans are greater

today than ever. The tolerance which I spoke of as the consequence of education means that the young are in all respects more tolerant than the old, because they have had more schooling and because their schooling has been more emancipated. For instance, to take the situation in the South today, the young people say in many southern communities, in the high schools, "If you left segregation to us, it would be all right." This tolerance, of course, has itself a moral quality. It is an expression of decency, generosity, sensitivity to the feelings of the other, great sensitivity. It has also a lack of fiber. It's a tolerance which goes over into indifference and a shrug of the shoulder, rather than being a firm moral principle.

Let us compare in this respect the ferocious tolerance of the Quaker, who is willing to die for his tolerance, and the tolerance of the youngster who shrugs his shoulders and says: "What is it to me what this fellow does or what he's like?" So I think it's a mixed thing and that while the young today are better than their elders in many ways, in terms of understanding, in terms of horizons, it's also a weakness.

QUESTION: Dr. Riesman, would you convince me a little bit more that young people lack collective goals? I am not a student of this subject; however I have been rather interested in it in the last few years.

DR. RIESMAN: Could you perhaps say a little about your own observations?

STUDENT: Yes. From my limited observation, I think we are over the hump in this field. It seems to me for example, in the health, education, and welfare field, which you impinged on, that we have a compelling force in that direction by our young college students.

Further, I don't believe that my children, for example, are any less hard-headed than I was in their direction and aggressiveness. I think we have probably in many State universities less drinking of alcoholic beverages than we did in the days when I was in college.

DR. RIESMAN: Very good. I mean, this is the trend I hoped our discussion would take, in which things would be qualified and elaborated and I would have a chance to make my own views more clear.

On your last point, I think there is more drinking and less drunkenness.

You are quite right. There is much more seriousness among young people today, more soberness. They get much better educated than we were. The better colleges are much better.

You remember, I spoke of the paradox of education for everybody, in which the less privileged parts of the population get worse education because we are trying to extend the school system to them. The better schools are better than they ever were. But this itself is a mixed blessing, and in discussing it I think I'll indicate some answer to your question.

If you went to a college where you were smarter than your teacher, you had a feeling of confidence and buoyancy, which might not have manifested itself in the curriculum: it might have manifested itself in the paper or other activities, but it gave you a feeling of "Well, once the old fuddy duddies get out of the way, there's room for me." Today the young people that I see, let us say, at Chicago or Harvard, are snowed by their faculty. We're too good. We're too avant garde. We're putting the young people in the position where they have to be much more serious, much more dedicated, to get the same feeling of confidence that they can accomplish something on their own. We, so to speak, outflank them. One indication of this is the fact that when I was in college, nobody ever talked about Marx, Freud, or any of the other figures whom you are studying this year. We had to get that outside the curriculum. Today a book is hardly mimeographed before it's assigned!

Now, the young people that I was talking about--and let's talk now only about the better, more highly educated and highly motivated young people--are not lacking, as I say, in purpose and seriousness; but it is a search for a private world. I have some evidence on this from a group of interviews that were done in 1955 in 20 leading colleges throughout the country, in which a group of seniors were asked, "What do you expect life to be like for you in 15 years?" In the first place, they all talked about the families they expected to have, and the children they expected to have, and the suburban home they expected to have. However, they were not materialistic--that, I think, is an older American pattern: to be sure, they wanted the accoutrements, but that was not

interesting for them. What was interesting were the personal relations, the friends, the family life, the companionable setting around the barbecue. Less important were the jobs that would provide this. They wanted those jobs to be interesting, not destructive. But, for instance, take a typical comment: There was a boy at Michigan who said: "I want to go into the advertising business, but I don't want to live in New York, even though I know that that is where most advertising is located." In general, they wanted to avoid the big heights. (The South again is somewhat of an exception. I remember one boy at Georgia Tech who said: "I'm going to work for Burlington Mills and make \$25,000 a year in South America, where there are lots of opportunities, and I'm going to write one of those Magnolia novels. There's money in that." This is characteristically "southern"--the older America is still represented there.)

Nevertheless, these young people do have goals, though not quite the traditional ones. They are complex and personal goals, very personal. But they're not collective goals. Or, to put it another way, to the extent that they are collective goals, they are civic rather than political. Let me explain what I mean by that.

They're going to live in the suburbs. They're going to join the PTA. They're going to concern themselves with good water and good government in the suburbs. The suburb is like the family--a manageable unit in an intractable world. To do something about the great world, about the question that the first speaker raised--this is something that I would think the best and the most sensitive young people today shy away from.

QUESTION: Dr. Riesman, don't you think that the Asch experiments on length of lines have been somewhat overgeneralized as indicating the directional proclivities of the average college person? I am wondering how the experiment would have come out if the subject had been offered \$5 or \$10 for the correct answer.

DR. RIESMAN: I think, with you, that one can certainly overgeneralize, and that people often do. All I was doing was to indicate the kinds of data, the kinds of material, on which one tries to build up a picture. But, as you know, there are many other experiments in persuasibility by Hovland and other people which indicate something of the same sort.

It has been my conclusion from the Asch experiments, not that we should offer them \$5 or \$10, although I think that's very interesting, but, rather, that every student should go through this, because it would be a wonderful inoculation against later deception as part of one's education.

QUESTION: I must admit, Doctor, that I'm getting more pessimistic by the minute. In that respect, sir, do you have a proposed solution for this? How about the colleges? You say the high schools should all be subjected to Asch experiments. Should the colleges be more forward in trying to make the students who do go to college realize that they have to get on the ball?

DR. RIESMAN: One finds a very paradoxical result of efforts, as you know, of preachment to the young in this respect. I was recently at a conference of college students from a number of the eastern colleges where I was told the following thing--which is not new to me, and which I have also observed--namely, that all the efforts to create more scientists, engineers, and so on among young people have on the one hand resulted as you imply, in what the Catholic Church would call vocations in this area. But it has had also the opposite effect. Some of the most able youngsters today are going into the classics. The classics have had an extraordinary revival. At a number of the colleges, youngsters want nothing to do with "hardware," nothing to do with the arms race, nothing to do with anything which is big project, big team, big operations, or such. It follows that one draws away from the very people one would like to recruit if one talks to them in this temper. And I think myself that the only thing that colleges can do is to make work in this field seem more exciting and adventurous rather than ominous and necessary. How this is to be done, given our academic culture, I just don't know.

QUESTION: Dr. Riesman, it seems to me that this change in drive and initiative of the young today must result from a difference in their environment created by science and education from what it was a generation or so ago. Would you comment on that?

DR. RIESMAN: Could you say a little more yourself about what you have in mind?

STUDENT: It seems to me that the attitudes of the young are the product of many things, but two important things--

DR. RIESMAN: What have been some of your own observations about this? What is the change in parents or schools that you have observed?

STUDENT: Well, my own feeling in my own small world is that the atmosphere of my own children is better in this respect by way of giving them examples or setting examples on the value of striving for goals and opportunities. Now, if kids today seek more family goals than they do vocational goals, much of the explanation for it is a change in the attitudes of their parents and in the educational field.

DR. RIESMAN: Well, the big change, to take the title from Frederick Lewis Allen's book called "The Big Change," is the change in the total structure of the national society, in which we now have a part. We are no longer in a position where a young person can think of himself as building a new organization. There are organizations around wherever he turns. Here one gets into the individual's imaginary projection of the social scene as well as into what the scene realistically presents. And whatever parents or schools might do to refurbish the older values, the American youngster "knows" that even with moderate effort he will get along, will do, in fact, moderately well; that there is a kind of "inflation" of jobs, of promotion--the escalator on which we live will carry him along; he knows that he doesn't have to surrender personal goals, like friendship and family, in order to achieve; that achievement is built into the system, into the very educational process.

One important element that has changed in the families and schools along with that, I would say, is this: Children are understood today. This is a mixed blessing for children--to be understood. It means that instead of having to struggle against hardship in the family and in the school, against brutality and oppression, their aims are welcome. They find themselves, as it were, fighting shadows, having to engage in extravagant conduct to get anybody angry at them. This is not always the easiest environment in which to develop one's own purposes. It's like the child who is reported to have said in the progressive school, "Teacher, do we again today have to do what we want to do?"

QUESTION: I was disturbed and somewhat surprised in hearing you preaching sermons of a lack of national goals. If I understood you correctly, you commented on the goal of competition with the Soviets as a

static goal. You spoke of the lack of national pioneer goals. It seems to me that this comment could have been made seven years ago, but not now. The obvious space age that is on us, it seems doesn't apply only in the scientific world, but also in the areas of medicine and law and all fields of endeavor. It also seems to me that if anything is not static, it's the competitiveness of a national overmatch of militaristic and national goals with the Soviets. Would you comment on that?

DR. RIESMAN: Let me say first that I'm glad somebody brought up the space age, because this is a theme on which I've had many arguments with people who agree with you.

My own feeling is this: that when America developed as a continent, Europe was overcrowded, full of feudal barriers and traditions and restraints, including the heavy hand of clericalism. The new world was a new world and offered an escape from European hierarchy, and it gave mankind a new opportunity. It seems to me that the problem today is not that men need that new opportunity for a new terrain, but they need to learn to live on the same planet together; and that the competition of which you speak, while it keeps us going and also the Soviet Union going, has its obvious dangers not only in terms of a nuclear catastrophe--the first question raised--but perhaps as seriously in the long run in terms of, suppose the Soviet Union were to disappear, what then?

Then your answer is Venus, Mars, the moon, space; and I would say, for a few, yes; and perhaps competition there will be one way of assuaging the cold war slightly, by transferring it to a kind of interplanetary football field. But I can't see it as a real hope for man. The problems are here on this earth and they need to be settled on this earth, on which, as I say, we need to learn to live.

QUESTION: Doctor, I'm a bit puzzled here. You have pointed out, as have various other members of the student body, that there are challenges galore confronting us. I think you admit that the challenges are that we learn to live with ourselves, learn to understand ourselves, learn to do with ourselves what is best under the circumstances. We must remember that all of us have an active life span of something like 60 years, give or take a few; and therefore we have to compress into this lifetime what we consider to be best for ourselves as individuals, have to go through life understanding it as we ourselves are able to understand

it, and that your personal views are different from my own, et cetera. But when all is said and done, why are we any worse off now than we were 100 years ago? Why do you paint such a gloomy picture?

DR. RIESMAN: That's a good question. I'm glad you raised it, because if we compare America with what it was 100 years ago or with the rest of the world, all the comparisons are advantageous. I have already spoken of this in reference to young people today, who I said are more sensitive, better educated, more tolerant than their elders. There's no question about it. The level of culture in America today is infinitely higher than it was in the era of Babbitt. The problem that I see is that these great developments, which if we were alone in the world would only be cause for rejoicing, hardly have kept pace with our problems. Our potentialities have grown more slowly than our problems.

The very advances of America, for instance, in economic development have had two terribly important deleterious consequences. One, that some of you may have been studying in Galbraith's book "The Affluent Society," is one that you are all familiar with in your own work, namely, that as the private enterprise sector of the economy becomes more and more effective in persuading people to buy the goods it turns out in order that it keep turning them out, the public sector--whether this is the armed services or schools, or sewage disposal, or city planning, or the halting of urban blight--is starved out, so that, while we get richer, we get unevenly richer vis-a-vis our own internal problems. It's harder in a way today to get money for the essential but neglected public sector, without scaring the people and fussing around a lot, than it should be in so rich a society.

The second and related thing is that we get much richer as the world gets much poorer. There are certain countries which have escaped the Malthusian hump, as you know from your work in the course. There are others, from Algeria to Indonesia, which are getting poorer by the minute as a result of the introduction of this long life span that you speak of. Correspondingly, it has become harder and harder for Americans to deal with the rest of the world, even though our tolerance has grown, because we're so far out of scale with the rest of the world. And thus some of our very blessings turn out in the present state of the planet to be mixed.

QUESTION: I am kind of left in the middle, Doctor. You said a lot about introspection and outer space. What is the theme on the planet? We seem to have no goals--and I, unfortunately, agree with you there--but what is the hope for a goal on this planet?

DR. RIESMAN: I wish I knew. I wish that I had an easy answer to your question. I wish that more social energy and thought were devoted to such a question.

One of the striking features of our time, it seems to me, is that we have a great many books that might be called negative Utopias, that is books like "Nineteen Eighty-Four" or "Brave New World," which say how terrible it is becoming or will shortly become. We have run out of what we produced a good many of in the last century--hopeful Utopias, like Bellamy's "Looking Backward," in which he said, "What would be a good world?"

Now, it's hard to think in such an extraordinary state of our culture of what would be a good world. Certainly some ready answers come to mind in the sense of what I said in answer to the last question, namely, more civilized cities, less urban sprawl and desecration of the countryside, more humane and benevolent relations with the rest of the world, especially the poorer countries, and an effort to cooperate even with our enemies to preserve life on the planet while other tasks get looked at. These are some of the issues. But they are not enough, I would say, necessary and imperative as they are, to make up a vision. And this, I would say at the moment, is what we lack.

QUESTION: Doctor, I think all of us here share your pessimism of what might happen as a result of a hydrogen bomb. But otherwise I think there is a reserve in our thinking as to the world in the future of our children, for example, in mechanical and electronic developments in energy development, in perhaps future greater use of solar energy sources, and certainly in the nuclear source of energy for peaceful purposes. I had about become convinced, and I think I still am, that we are at the threshold of greater advances than the Nation has ever had in its past for technological progress and probably expansion in industry, new products, greater use than in the past of the elements for the betterment of society as a whole, in which all of our children, given drive and incentive, can participate. Then there's always Alaska to move into.

DR. RIESMAN: If you mean the whole world, I would agree. If you mean just this country, I would not, because it seems to me that we are already in a situation where in large, relatively privileged sectors of our population, people have got their own domestic plant fairly well in hand. Oh, surely, we could all use a little more room, although this is precisely one of the things we are least likely to get as our population grows, as it has in part as a result of the familism that I have spoken of.

But one problem that seems to me not dealt with in your question is our relation to our work. I have been studying Americans' attitudes to work now for some years, and I come more and more to feel that the job has little meaning for most Americans. I have seen studies in which Americans were asked: "If you no longer had to work, if you had all the money you needed, would you work?" Most people say "Yes" in a kind of spiritless way, not because they really like their work--they don't--but because they would like being around the house even less. They would call that, in a phrase that some of you may know, "the honey do day," in which the refrain is: "Honey, do this; Honey, do that."

They can't imagine a life without work as giving it some kind of fulcrum. And yet the work itself is relatively joyless and relatively frustrating for an enormous number of Americans, even in the professional and executive groups. And as more and more electronics and more and more automation come in, and as more and more of the industrial tasks of society become routinized, then where is work going to be meaningful? Alaska is certainly not enough for that.

QUESTION: I'd like to pursue this question of goals. To me as a layman, our goal fundamentally or, to put it in plain English, to beat Russia is purely survival. This goal is not a pleasant goal in the sense that gold in California would give you the incentive to run. But it is back of the basic instinct of man--survival. So our problem is not to have a goal, but to convince the American people that this goal, even though it be a negative goal, must be carried out. Would you comment on that?

DR. RIESMAN: I think actually--and here I know I would differ perhaps from the great majority of you--the goal of survival and the goal of beating the Russians have certain contradictions in them, and so long as that is our double goal, we may lose both.

But, quite apart from that, I don't believe--and I don't know whether Dr. Kluckhohn discussed this yesterday--that in the case of human beings one can talk about survival as an instinct. There are societies, as we all know, which have not survived, where life has lost its savor and people have given up. We know this is true of individuals. They don't need to commit suicide to establish the fact that life has lost its meaning. They simply get tired. We know, for instance--and this goes back to what I was saying a moment ago about work--that when many people retire, they wither, they die. They are afraid of retirement because they know that this may happen. Companies which have automatically retired people as universities do, at 65, have become aware that this is often a death sentence.

A negative goal, it seems to me, can sustain people for only a relatively short time and even then only on a moral basis. I was reading last night a paper by Vann Woodward, the historian I mentioned earlier, in which he talked about the War Between the States and how it began with in a way the negative goal of union--"We mustn't let the South go"--on the northern side. On the southern side it began with the more positive goal of creating one's own and different society. But as the war went on and got more wearisome, other goals had to come in to replace the original goal that Lincoln had, of union--goals of freedom, of emancipation, and even of equality, which gave a positive content to what originally had been a relatively negative goal.

I believe that the goal of survival may induce in Americans temporary states of perhaps not even helpful hysteria, or voting of budgets, and so on; but in the long run I doubt very much if this will even produce its own aim of survival. I don't believe that man as a social being, whose goals are given not by instinct, but by the culture and by the human situation which he confronts in his culture, will live if all he cares about is just living. This is not enough.

CAPTAIN POWELL: Dr. Riesman, those students who are pursuing this course of study are going to be fortunate indeed to receive the discussion this afternoon in the auditorium. On behalf of the College, I wish to thank you for a very brilliant and stimulating help in our course of study.

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