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AMERICAN CULTURAL THEMES AND SOCIAL WORK

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SOCIAL anthropologists have been concerned in recent years with the attempt to discover the themes which give unity to American culture. These themes are described as generalized orientations, "powerful in their hold upon the American mind and imagination."¹ They are the standards of behavior to be found in the "core culture," developed by the early English settlers on American soil and accepted most fully today by the white Protestant Anglo-American lower middle class.² They are the values of the mass culture, the least common denominator of all the varied subcultures carried by different segments of American society.³ It seems worth while to examine these high-level abstractions in relation to various subcultures, at a somewhat more concrete level of analysis. The analytical scheme used in this paper is one proposed by Clyde and Florence Kluckhohn.⁴ The specialized socio-cultural system to which it is to be applied is that of social work.

The rapid development of social work, which appears on the surface to be so contrary to the American way of life, calls for some re-examination both of the mass culture and of this particular variant. Why should individualistic Americans, bitterly resentful of any outside interference in their affairs, demand so much more of this type of assistance than the steadily increasing number of schools of social work are prepared to provide? Furthermore, since the clients of social work agencies come so largely from that segment of society most thoroughly indoctrinated in the core culture, the results of their experience with this category of professionals needs to be evaluated in terms of possible culture change. Is the American

hierarchy of values being modified, and if so, in what directions? It is with such questions that this paper is concerned.

EFFORT AND OPTIMISM

The basis for social work is the conviction that there is a way out of an individual's or a family's difficulties. No situation is so bad that it cannot be bettered. To a certain extent improvement is brought about by the manipulation of the environment, but increasing emphasis is laid upon the client's active participation in his own salvation. Social workers, however, part company with those who believe that any American can solve all his problems by his own unaided effort. They offer their expert assistance in getting people out of troubles too great for them to manage alone, and their help is accepted by a steadily growing proportion of the population. Also in contradiction to the stereotypes of our culture, social workers are not possessed by a boundless optimism which they communicate to their clients. They promise only improvement, not ideal solutions. They urge those who come to them to make the best possible compromise with reality. They hold out no hope of miracles, but only limited rewards for renewed effort.

The change in orientation is not just in the degree of optimism with which social workers view the future prospects of their clients. Case histories indicate a certain qualitative change. American culture, as contrasted with Chinese culture for example, has been dominantly goal-directed. Americans have been interested in getting things done. Chinese are concerned with establishing and maintaining harmonious relationships. The personality of the Chinese gentleman is considered by his friends and himself as a work of art, into whose evaluation no utilitarian considerations enter. The personality of the American businessman is thought of as instrumental to the carrying on of enterprises.

The social worker is increasingly concerned with the satisfactions to be secured through family relationships. She realizes that her clients will be engaged in purposive activities, but she judges her own success by the growing happiness of their

¹ Clyde and Florence R. Kluckhohn, "American Culture: Generalized Orientations and Class Patterns," in Lyman Bryson, et al. (eds.), *Conflicts of Power in Modern Culture* (New York, 1947), p. 107.

² Jurgen Ruesch, "Social Technique, Social Status, and Social Change in Illness," in Clyde Kluckhohn and Henry A. Murray (eds.), *Personality in Nature, Society, and Culture* (New York, 1948), p. 127.

³ John W. Bennett and Melvin M. Tummin, *Social Life: Structure and Function* (New York, 1948), pp. 603-606, 623-629.

⁴ See footnote 1 above.

private lives. To her, personality development is the chief value, provided always of course that it is not used to anti-social ends. Whether social work is cause or effect in the process of change is not important. The indications are that a new basis for optimism is being sought. In a stabilized economy, not everyone can secure a sense of achievement through material rewards greater than his neighbor has obtained. But most individuals can grow in sensitivity to other people, capacity for enjoyment, maturity in understanding, and conscious awareness of their own development. It is at least possible to conceive that satisfactions from the possession of things are being replaced in larger measure than in the past, by satisfactions derived from the enrichment of personal life.

MORAL PURPOSE

It is at this point that social work makes one of its most significant breaks with naive culture. The core culture is characterized by a rigid and repressive moral code, especially in regard to sex relations. Relief agencies had their own nineteenth century variant of this puritanic ethic. They demanded of their beneficiaries, industry, thrift, gratitude, and, after the temperance movement got under way, sobriety, and were vocal in their disapproval of behavior not appropriate, from their point of view, for "objects of charity."

The modern social worker has been thoroughly trained in non-judgmental attitudes and has learned to accept, at least without outward signs of distaste, behavior which would have seemed to her morally reprehensible before she entered a professional school.⁵ Her greater tolerance stems partly from an understanding of deviant behavior more profound than the ordinary citizen possesses. Perhaps it would be more correct to say, in the light of the Kinsey report, that social workers are fully aware of the fact that the range of normal behavior is much broader than the ideal patterns imply. A more realistic appraisal of the current situation keeps her from finding fault with conduct that occurs in life much more frequently than in conventional thinking.

The social worker also differs from the carriers of the core culture in her assessment of the most

effective methods for inculcating norms of conduct. The new social learning theory stresses the greater efficacy of rewards as against punishment, in bringing about desired modifications in behavior.⁶ Experiments in group therapy have indicated the ways in which a permissive atmosphere contributes to the ability of the troubled personality to use his own initiative in working out a more satisfying adjustment to reality.⁷ The social worker finds the core culture unduly inhibitory of normal human responses, especially to unsatisfactory situations. She has become convinced that the fundamental and essential demands of the social order can be satisfied without as much sacrifice of the individual's potentialities for growth as the mass culture requires. What is more important from the point of view of culture change is that, in company with many other professionals, she tries to share her tolerance with parents as they face the behavior of their children. It seems probable that, in this process of parent guidance, American moral codes are being redefined and made less repressive at the lower middle class level.

RATIONALISM

Karl Mannheim discusses the difference between what he calls functional rationalization and substantial rationality.⁸ Rationalization of the individual takes place when he is fitted, more or less as an automaton, into a functionally rational series of actions. Substantial rationality exists in its most complete form, when the individual is not only able to control his own impulses but also to view himself objectively and to understand why he behaves as he does. Mannheim's criticism of an industrial society arises from the fact that it increases the functional rationalization of its members, without adding appreciably to their substantial rationality. That way lies mass society, a huge instrument to be wielded by any power-mad demagogue.

Social workers would subscribe to Mannheim's position that modern man is not inevitably a

⁶ For the Yale theory of social learning, see Neale Miller and John Dollard, *Social Learning and Imitation* (New Haven, 1941); John Dollard, "The Acquisition of New Social Habits," in Ralph Linton (ed.), *The Science of Man in the World Crisis* (New York, 1943) pp. 442-464. See also the reference in footnote 2.

⁷ S. R. Slavson has done most to publicize the developments in group therapy.

⁸ Karl Mannheim, *Man and Society in an Age of Reconstruction* (New York, 1940), pp. 51-60.

⁵ An excellent illustration of this is found in the case of Helen Johnson, reported in Florence Hollis, *Social Case Work in Practice: Six Case Studies* (New York, 1939), chap. 5.

"rational animal." They are, however, Americans as the Kluckhohns describe us.

Our glorification of "science" and our faith in what can be accomplished through "education," are two striking aspects of our generalized conviction that secular, humanistic effort will improve the world in a series of changes, all or mainly for the better,⁹

They have accepted the idea and are incorporating the practice of non-directive counseling, which rests on faith in the ordinary man's capacity for the rational ordering of his own life.¹⁰ So far has the movement toward self-direction gone and so fundamental to modern social work is the belief in the possibility of rational action by human beings, that very young children are encouraged to gain insight into their disturbing relations with their parents and thereby learn to deal themselves with the resulting problems.¹¹ Environmental factors which social workers a decade or so ago would have considered so unfavorable as to demand either removal of the child or modification of his situation by an external agency, are now thought within the child's capacity to handle with training. At the same time children, who would have been approached only through their mothers, now have their own case workers and receive treatment directly.

The social worker shows his orientation to American mass culture by refusing to admit, publicly at least, that there are people who are incapable of rational goal-directed behavior. In practice, of course, mental deficiency and mental illness set limits to therapy as well as to education. She is also American in ignoring religion, though she may bring it into her calculations because of its therapeutic value and she is aware of the importance of church membership as status-defining and possessed of associational satisfactions for some of her clients.

Social work is definitely aimed at combatting the depersonalization of human beings by modern industry and urban anonymity. Active participation in a process of interaction as sophisticated as

⁹ Clyde and Florence R. Kluckhohn, *loc. cit.*, p. 111.

¹⁰ The leading exponent of non-directive counseling is Carl B. Rogers. See especially his *Counseling and Psychotherapy: Newer Concepts in Practice* (Boston, 1942).

¹¹ A recent discussion of this development is to be found in Eleanor Clifton and Florence Hollis (eds.), *Child Therapy: A Casework Symposium* (New York, 1948).

it provides, is bound to increase the substantial rationality of a large proportion of the people affected by it.

ROMANTIC INDIVIDUALISM

The mass culture tends to define social workers as meddling busybodies, interfering with other people's lives to relieve the frustrations of their own experience. And yet social work is an expanding profession with many more positions open than there are trained professionals to fill them. There is, too, a stigma on accepting the help of social agencies, but their clients grow in numbers year by year. Why should Americans who hate "being told what to do," go as so many of them do, to family counseling agencies and child guidance clinics where they get nothing but advice? The "something for nothing" philosophy sends a fair number of individuals to relief offices, but making use of the skilled services of a social worker requires a different type of motivation and one that runs counter to the ideology of romantic individualism.

De Tocqueville found the Americans of his day more interested in equality than in freedom. A social worker might be justified in claiming that her clients are more concerned with success than with freedom, if freedom is defined as individualistic effort. Social settlements have been criticized for aiding their members to climb up the social ladder, but it is doubtful whether any form of social work can succeed with a person who is not motivated by a desire for increased prestige or esteem. American culture has defined more rigidly the goal of "keeping up with the Joneses," or getting ahead of them, than the socially acceptable methods of attaining that goal. Competition for money and position excuses a "multitude of sins," ranging from violations of the law to the acceptance of professional assistance. An applicant for case-work guidance must have reached the point of evaluating the desired improvement in status more highly than the complete independence upon which our myth of free enterprise places such supreme importance.

The Kluckhohns refer to the fact that "social change has its origins in the strains and dissatisfactions felt by specific individuals." Social workers are sometimes accused of attempting to adjust individuals to situations that ought to be changed and thereby blocking progress. In a sense, American society has followed English precedent, in using such agents to buy off social revolution. Social workers would say, however, that the new

equilibrium, which they along with other liberals see as necessary, has to be worked out, individual by individual and group by group, if it is not to be imposed by a totalitarian state in the interests of a powerful bureaucracy. Only when a new way of thinking has been adopted by large sections of the public, can it be democratically enacted into law. In helping people to make the best of the present age, social workers might claim that they were preparing the way for the "new world a-comin'."

As has been pointed out before, one of the contributions of social work to the changing American culture may be through the redefining of what constitutes success. In some cases increased earning power results for the client from the social-work process, but usually the chief gains are not such as can be measured in dollars and cents. The divorce of the concept of romantic individualism from the defensive aggressiveness of the market place might bring it into closer accord with present day realities. Since non-material satisfactions are not subject to the economic laws of scarcity, social work may aid in establishing our cherished ideology on a surer foundation. Aspirations for individual growth in understanding and insight and capacity for the appreciation of the simple joys of living are possible of satisfaction even without an unlimited bank account. Not only are such gains not secured at the expense of the "other fellow," they are in general obtained more easily and in larger measure by persons as members of groups. In other words, modern Americans apparently are faced with the necessity of giving up either their romance or their individualism. Social workers urge their clients to value the possibility of hope fulfilled more highly than the unrealistic belief in the rugged aloneness of their endeavor.

CULT OF THE AVERAGE MAN

The charity of the seventeenth, eighteenth, and nineteenth centuries, out of which social work developed, found a more congenial setting in the aristocratic society of the eastern seaboard than in the frontier democracy of the Old and New West. The principle of less eligibility was in time evolved to define the position of "objects of charity" as below the poorest of independent workmen. By the middle of the nineteenth century, there was a genuine fear of the "dangerous classes" as a threat to the vested interests of power and privilege.¹² The wide gulf between the "five hun-

dred" of New York society and the poor German rag and bone collectors who made Murray Hill a noisome stench, or the slum dwellers whose living conditions and behavior gave rise to such street names as Poverty Lane and Murderers' Alley, was thrown into vivid relief by the draft riots of 1862. The cult of the average men had no strong hold upon many occupants of upper class position. Their relation to the underdog was not one of sympathetic identification but rather, on the one hand, of using him to indicate their own superior status and to buttress its foundations and, on the other, of appeasing him when he growled too loudly and ominously.

Opposed to these upper class ways of thinking, there was always the belief that the average man was the chief treasure of the state. Beginning with the decade of depression following the panic of 1837, there was also a clear realization on the part of many intelligent citizens that business cycles were responsible for more poverty than the character defects of the working class. While nineteenth century philanthropists fought bitterly against the idea that any man had a right to relief, especially from the public treasury, state care for many categories of need nevertheless gained ground. There was less resistance to the practice of providing through private beneficence many of the amenities of life for those isolated from the main stream of American culture through ignorance and poverty.

Over and over again in our national development, reforms have been tried out first on the poor and then passed on to the wealthy. Kindergartens and nursery schools, playgrounds and summer camps, manual training and child guidance were made available to slum children long before they were common among the well-to-do. The initial push for the establishment of Massachusetts General Hospital was given by the chaplain of the Boston almshouse. Medical social work was there first provided for middle-class patients, but not until a quarter of a century after the charity wards had enjoyed such service. The social settlement was only one of the overt expressions of the cult of the average man.

Social work counters the compulsion to conform to the standards of one's own social *milieu*. More accurately it broadens the world of its clients, establishing contacts with a wider range of class orientations and a greater variety of specialized subcultures, than the ordinary person can attain

¹² See, for example, Charles Loring Brace, *The Dangerous Classes in New York* (New York, 1880).

without such help.¹³ It thereby prevents De Tocqueville's "enfeeblement of the individual," by enabling him to make a voluntary choice, or at least to cherish the illusion of choosing, between many alternatives. At the same time selectiveness and permissiveness are so combined in the social-work setting that the client is guided in making his selection and is reassured as to the wisdom of his choice. It is rather like buying in a small dress shop, run by a woman of good taste, instead of a great department store catering to thousands of customers. The client is steered between the sense of being driven by blind fate and the need to "escape from freedom."

To continue with the Kluckhohn analysis, griping has received a college education and been graduated into scientific terminology. It has become the cathartic release of repressed hostility feelings, which is encouraged by the social worker, especially as it enters into the client's attitude toward herself and the work of her agency. Whether it is as satisfying a release of tension in such a permissive atmosphere might be open to question. The fact that superficial intimacy is relatively easy among Americans may contribute to the spread of social work. That so many people can enter into a case work relationship is due in part to the relative articulateness in the presence of strangers, which has been developed in our society. The one-sided intimacy that grows up in such a setting is, of course, far from superficial so far as the client is concerned.

The trade-union movement has succeeded in removing from American labor the derogatory label of underdog. Social work is contributing to its removal from other categories of Americans. The professional, in order to respect himself, must respect whoever makes use of his expert knowledge and skill. Since most of his clientele are neither distinguished nor successful, the social worker often acquires a more profound faith than the ordinary citizen in the worth of the common man and in his ability to help himself. Underdog is fast becoming a title reserved for aliens to our culture and society. This change is of significance in American international relations.

¹³ This is brought out especially clearly in the case of the Seaton family, reported in Elizabeth Dixon and Grace Browning (eds.), *Social Case Records: Family Welfare* (Chicago, 1938), pp. 29-78.

TENDENCY TO PERSONALIZE

Americans tend to state issues in terms of men rather than principles. It was Truman against Dewey, in the last election, not conflicting ideas or social forces. Further, in our mass society even the littlest man wants to stand out as a figure and not a cipher. Commercial interests cater to this desire by their offers of individualized hair styles and personalized letter paper. Social work helps to make our culture, which is person-centered in a superficial or spurious sense, person-centered at a deeper level of reality. Successful people are rewarded by public notice. The unsuccessful are compensated in part by having the undivided attention of at least one person for an allotted period of time.

Social workers are concerned with unique individuals, not with categories of need. The new social security legislation does pigeonhole millions of people, but then decrees the employment of social workers to sort over the mass of humanity and to personalize the services offered. In fact the emphasis on the uniqueness of the individual has been such that it blocked for a while the drawing of any generalizations from a series of case histories. It stood in the way, too, of the use of group therapy for clients who would have profited from it but whom the case workers insisted should be treated only as individuals.

CHANGE A VALUE IN ITSELF

In a sense social work opposes social change. It emphasizes adjustment to things as they are, rather than action to usher in a new world. The importation from Europe of psychoanalysis has brought with it the tendency to brand the radical, and often even the liberal, as of unsound mind. This is, of course, only a very partial truth. While social workers preach conformity to their clients, they are often themselves in the forefront of social movements.

Social workers, as professionals, tend to translate change into personal terms. They place high in their hierarchy of values the growth of their clients and their increasing individualization, even if increasing sensitivity may mean a greater capacity for feeling pain. One of the chief differences between Russia and the United States lies in the different conception of the place of the individual in the scheme of things. In Russia, patterns of change are devised at the top and imposed on

the mass of men. The individual has to fit himself into his designated role or be destroyed by the state. In America, the individual retains at least some sense of freedom and autonomy. By his voluntary acceptance of new attitudes and activities, he contributes to their general adoption. Social workers play one of their chief roles, in trying to ease the strains and tensions of a dynamic society, by assisting their clients to participate actively in its dynamism.

PLEASURE PRINCIPLE

Charity workers in the nineteenth century put their emphasis, in dealing with their beneficiaries, on work for work's sake. The social settlements made the first great break with our puritanic past, by their insistence that even slum dwellers had a right to a full and rich life. They tried to break into the vicious cycle of the working man's day as he went from long hours of monotonous labor in the factory to equally degrading hours in the saloon. The provision of opportunities for satisfying enjoyment, especially for children, has been an important aspect of social work in the past three-quarters of a century.

One of the interesting developments in case work in the last twenty-five years has been the attempt to remove the sense of guilt from the acceptance of relief. Social workers have gone farther, to the position that their clients have a right to enjoy life, even if they are not completely independent economically.¹⁴ Pleasure is not, however, an end in itself but one means to personality growth. Reference has already been made to the emphasis upon rewards in the new social learning theory. Gregory Bateson contrasts the Balinese society in which men's actions are controlled by the "enjoyment of fear," with the American in which the hope of reward is so widely pervasive. He raises the question as to whether we could be spurred to maximum effort by "a nameless, shapeless, unlocated hope of enormous achievement."¹⁵ A social worker would probably reply that for her clients a tangible movie or a new dress or a summer vacation would probably be more immediately stimulating.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*

¹⁵ Gregory Bateson, "Social Planning and the Concept of 'Deutero-learning,'" in Theodore M. Newcomb and Eugene L. Hartley (eds.), *Readings in Social Psychology* (New York, 1947), pp. 121-128.

EXTERNALISM

Here again social work is either parting company with mass culture or leading the way to new evaluations. Social work itself has changed in the last quarter of a century. To give one example, the standards by which home finders used to appraise foster homes for children were the externals of the house, its size, furnishing and cleanliness. Today they are more concerned with the atmosphere of the home and the warmth of family relationships.

The psychological need for externals has been recognized in relief standards to a certain extent. Provision is made for the status element in food and clothing and shelter. But the social worker has been moving steadily away from the conception of her job as one of doling out things to that of dealing with people. In considering the relationships of her clients, her attention has been directed away from their ranking and competitive aspects to the satisfactions to be gained at a deeper level of human interaction.

SIMPLE ANSWERS

In the nineteenth century and before, simple answers were the only ones available, but social-work experience fully demonstrated their ineffectiveness. "Not alms but a friend" sounded well to Victorian ears, but did not stand up under the scrutiny of intelligent minds trained in the social sciences of the modern age.¹⁶ The Travelers Aid and the Red Cross have been forced by circumstances to invest short-time contacts with meaning and significance, but where it is at all possible the social-work relationship is given time to develop.¹⁷ The major change, however, came with the realization that most personal problems are not just monetary. Money plays its part but often as a symbol of deeper difficulties. The emphasis today is on the complexity of the task of the social worker and the need for her long training and experience in human relationships. One of the most interesting aspects of social work to watch, is the growing development in sharing with clients this sense of the complexity of their own motivations

¹⁶ "Not alms but a friend," was a motto coined by Robert Treat Paine for the Associated Charities of Boston in the eighteen-nineties.

¹⁷ R. S. Wilson, *The Short Contact in Social Work: A Study of Time-limited Relationships in Social Work* (New York, 1937).

and of the depth of change required in their own understanding and response to their social world.

HUMOR

Social work tends to be defensive in regard to humor. Workers are most keenly aware of it as a sanction used against them. They still smart at the injustice of the W.P.A. jokes, and they wince at the crude caricatures of the social worker enshrined in certain bitter novels. They work to establish a permissive atmosphere for their clients in which they can relax and to develop in them a sane and cheerful philosophy of life. They retain their right to employ humor in their private lives, but it plays small part in professional literature.

GENEROSITY

Social work has profited by the generosity so characteristic of American society. It would never have developed without the gifts of the philanthropic. During the nineteenth century, however, charity workers carried on a constant warfare against person-to-person alms. In our careless and socially competitive society, such gifts were apt to be giver-centered and emotionally exploitative of the recipient. In many ways, social work runs counter to the older American ethos in its insistence on impersonalized giving. On the other hand, it has helped to redefine our democracy which insists that no one is so poor that he should be embarrassed by having to accept money given to him personally out of pity. Instead, the cult of the average man has brought it about that American generosity is being translated by legislators and officials into publicly financed provisions for meeting all the needs of our citizens, without requiring that any shall demean himself by appealing to the sympathy of the prosperous occupants of higher social positions.

Social work has been engaged, too, in replacing volunteers and the untrained by professionals. Does the depersonalization of the giving of both money and aid mean either the frustration of the generous or the elimination of generosity from the list of American virtues. The development of voluntary forms of service for which some training is required and in which some discipline is enforced, in connection with the hospitals, possibly points the way to new uses of altruism. In the field of international relations, imaginatively conceived outlets have been opened up for the expression of sympathy. It might be wise, however, for social work

to continue to wait while creativity is tested in types of human relationships, in which one party is not at such a disadvantage as compared to the other.

ASSOCIATIONALISM

Ever since the days of DeTocqueville, Americans have been aware of their tendency to associationalism. The Kluckhohns connect the fact that we are a nation of joiners with our gregariousness and with the cult of the average man. But associationalism has been used also for the securing of power and prestige, for social climbing, or at least for making certain of one's place in the social structure. Organizations have been substituted for the family, as status-defining agencies, in a society where position is gained more often by achievement than inherited through ascription.

Charity organizations in the past were socially useful to many of the people who founded, supported, and ran them. Prestige has been attached to public generosity in an unusually high degree by American society. But fish peddlers only rarely become millionaires in these degenerate days, and large fortunes are tending to be fewer in number, thanks to the income and the inheritance tax. There is a growing realization that even the wealthiest community has only a limited amount of resources to divide among its people or to expend for the common welfare. At the same time the demands and the possibilities for community spending increase with each new advance in Utopian thinking. Community councils are developing as centralized agencies, semi-public in nature, to determine priorities in the allotting of a fixed income among desirable expenditures.

Social work has accepted the principles of joint planning and joint financing. Free enterprise, as we have long known it in this field, is coming to an end. No longer is the individual permitted, by reason of the possession of money, to set up a new charity to suit his fancy. His gifts must follow carefully defined patterns designed to keep the social economy in balance. But it is possible that free enterprise in human relationships is getting a new lease on life. The councils of Jews and Christians, the Quaker work camps, the interchange of visits among the farmwomen of this and other lands are cases in point. In the eighteenthies, the social settlements pioneered in bringing people together over class lines and across the bitter abyss that separated labor and capital. Present-day social work is engaged in nothing so

dramatic, but it is engaged in experimenting with planned groups to serve a variety of ends.

EXPERTNESS

A negative aspect of the cult of the average man has been the resistance of Americans to the development of expertness, especially in public service. But the more complex a society grows, the greater its need for specialization. Folk controls no longer work in such a situation. American society has developed to a unique degree professionalization for the self-policing of groups with highly specialized skills and attitudes, and for the protecting of the public welfare against a group's own private interests.

Ordinary people need to understand their position in relation to the professionals whose services they increasingly employ. Social workers have gone far in the democratization of the professional-

client relationship. They have realized, too, the desirability of making clear to their "employers" just what the possibilities and the limits of such service are. The client of a social agency ought, by that very fact, to understand better the importance of professionalism in our society and to be better able to make constructive use of experts in other fields.

In conclusion, social work reflects to some extent, the older culture of America. It responds in part to the far-reaching changes that are remaking both our behavioral patterns and our social structure. Through its own development, it contributes in large measure to the process of peaceful evolution, and through its clients it helps to domesticate a mass of new ideas and attitudes. It also serves to ease the tensions caused by social dynamism at the points where they are most keenly felt.

BETTER HOMES FOR NEGRO FAMILIES IN THE SOUTH*

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SINCE the close of World War II, interesting developments have been taking place in the South, through the initiative and resources of private industry and finance, in supplying the Negro market with FHA-insured living accommodations.¹ This paper attempts to focus attention on this new trend which promises some relief to hundreds of American communities where the housing of Negroes is a major social problem. It is significant that for the most part these modern, lower-cost dwellings for Negroes are being constructed in the South, where half of the urban Negro families are concentrated and where their median incomes are just half of those of their white neighbors.

By way of introduction and to furnish some necessary background, a brief review will first be

* Read before the twelfth annual meeting of the Southern Sociological Society, Knoxville, Tennessee, April 1, 1949.

¹ The fact that the Federal Housing Administration insured the mortgages may be regarded as prima facie evidence of sound construction, functional design, and suitable location.

presented of the housing needs and accommodations of Negroes prior to World War II, with special emphasis upon the benefits Negroes in southern communities received through the public housing programs sponsored by the Roosevelt administration. Attention will also be directed towards the acute situation which resulted from the movement of war workers during World War II and the return of ex-soldiers at the close of the war.

GAINS UNDER THE NEW DEAL

Prior to the advent of the New Deal's slum-clearance program, the average Negro family, wherever located, rarely had the opportunity to enjoy newly-built, first-class housing accommodations. Negro housing of the past, more so than that of the white population, has been largely characterized by blighted neighborhoods, slum conditions, substandard accommodations, and has been distressingly infested with the germs of disease, depravity, and crime. A study by a housing