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## "Citizenship in a Changing Civilization" by Melvin Brannon, UND Spring Commencement: June 1947

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CITIZENSHIP IN A CHANGING CIVILIZATION

In the foreword of his great book, *The Conquest of Civilization*, the world's leading orientalist, the late James Henry Breasted, declared: "The fact that man possessed the capacity to rise from bestial savagery to civilization, at a time when it had never before been done is the greatest fact in the history of the universe as known to us. For this amazing new capability, transcending merely physical development and the evolution of more efficient organs, disclosed a kind of buoyancy of the human spirit, never before displayed in the history of life on our planet. For the first time it demonstrated the ability of the creature man to rise. Insofar then, as the career of life is known to terrestrial intelligence, the emergence of a creature capable of thus rising, is, I repeat, the greatest fact in the universe. Purely conjectural recognition of the fact is old, - older than Greek culture perhaps, but a demonstration of the fact, combined with scientific study of the processes and successive stages by which this supreme achievement of man has come about, is a matter of the last two generations." This great achievement was accomplished by the Breasted Egyptologists and their immediate predecessors.

How long it is since that "buoyancy of the human spirit" enabled the first creatures, men, to rise from savagery to civilization, however, primitive, is unknown. No records have been found; only estimates can be made. It may be several hundreds of thousands of years. The Cro-Magnon Man, much advanced beyond the earlier Neanderthal man, appeared in western Europe, perhaps 25,000 years ago. While there have been many archeological records discovered, there are so many hiatuses in the records that detailed studies are wholly impossible thus far in the searches in rocks and caves of the world. In more recent times, say 6,000 years, historians consider that nineteen different civilizations have risen and reached important developments. Most of them have reached a maximum level, continued for a time, declined and died. Today five civilizations are definitely considered relative to economic, social, educational, artistic, industrial, religious, and political factors. How long will these present civilizations survive? Preceding civilizations which obeyed the law of change, and adjusted economically, socially and politically, have advanced and survived. When they failed to adjust, they declined and died. Five still exist. How long will they endure?

The major study in the history of civilizations is the study of the law of change in their rising, leveling off, declining and dying. It shows that without exception, nature unfailingly exacts the penalty of death from any civilization which does not adjust its economic, its social life, its industry, its education, its morals, its politics, its philosophy, its religion, and all of its manifold social interests to changes inherent in the evolution of social institutions.

Every student of biology knows that indubitably every plant and animal must adjust its metabolism and development to the chemical and physical factors of its environment or pay the penalty of disappearing from the earth. There is no vicarious alternative. Where are the giant dinosaurs of the Mesozoic era, and the buffalos of recent times?

In the light of Dr. Breasted's declaration respecting "the greatest fact in the history of the universe as known to us," let us consider Citizenship in a Changing Civilization.

When the university student completes his apprenticeship in formal education he passes to the status of citizen. He is granted important opportunities with reciprocal obligations. The great privilege of citizenship automatically imposes the great obligation to use political rights with intelligence and fidelity. This obligation is increasingly difficult because the rapidly changing world has mechanized all human relations. The agencies for the rapid transportation of persons and materials from place to place, and modern means of speedily communicating news, have made the whole world a common neighborhood. This process of fluidizing materials and ideas has modified customs and conventions in society, modified certain ancient ideas relative to honor and integrity, and intensified competition of every sort in production of goods, in commerce, finance, and every department of public organization. The consequences are obvious in national and international economic, social, and political affairs. The radical changes in the modern world demand a degree of "regeneration which is dangerous to postpone, but as yet impossible to imagine, let alone direct. We wish to create an unprecedented attitude of mind to cope with unprecedented knowledge in which we must let loose of our fond prejudices and open our minds. We should proceed to the thorough reconstruction of our minds with a view to understanding human conduct and organization."

Citizenship is a term vaguely understood and loosely used. Specifically, it refers to the status of an individual who enjoys the privileges of the state, and

faithfully discharges his political duties. It is the result of long and arduous efforts of multitudes of people through ages of time. It is the summation of all human endeavor to secure freedom of thought and action, freedom to develop self, freedom to express self occupationally, freedom to possess and to retain property lawfully acquired, and freedom to pursue happiness. The Preamble of the Constitution of the United States accents citizenship as the ultimate objective of man's age-long ideal "to promote the general welfare of all the people." Attempts to realize such ideals of citizenship have frequently been thwarted by organized minorities of selfishness and noncooperation. These exhibits are found in all divisions of local, state, and national government in all countries.

Citizenship rests upon definite basic principles. First in order is the principle of national unity. Its evolution was slow in the United States because the builders of the Republic were strong individualists. They were opposed to a powerful central government located at some point which seemed far remote in the days of pioneer transportation. The question of states' rights arose early in our national history. Jefferson and Calhoun were proponents of a strong state government as opposed to a highly centralized federal agency. Hamilton, the great federalist, was strongly suspicious of the average citizen, having little faith in his ability, and even less in his fidelity in the discharge of political duties. Hamilton believed a great power was necessary in order to carry great burdens. He knew that the exercise of government was concerned primarily with economic relations and secondarily with social and political relations. In order to discharge large economic responsibilities he stoutly advocated a highly centralized federal agency. Huge expenditures, enormous commitments in public credits, and greatly increasing social service require increasingly greater power on the part of the federal government.

The second principle of citizenship is the orderly development of governmental administration. The operation of this principle requires intelligent cooperation at all times of citizens devoted to orderly procedure as opposed to revolution. However, rigid adherence to primary tenets and ancient laws is undoubtedly responsible for certain "lags" in government which cause many difficulties. Two procedures are possible for the correction of these ills. One is to employ the constitution itself, that is, submit proposals for corrections of "lag" by amendments of the constitution. The other procedure is to employ legislative authority not delegated by the states to the federal government, through mandates and commissions. A study of history

convinces one that evolution is preferable to revolution in the political, as well as in the organic world.

The third principle in citizenship is liberty. This is a priceless birthright which we often take for granted. It has been man's primitive hunger in all of his struggles for freedom. Its keen appreciation was voiced by the blind Milton when he said, "Give me liberty to know, to utter, and to argue freely according to my conscience, above all other liberties."

The fourth principle of citizenship is the discharge of democratic duties. This stalwart principle is neglected and apparently denied by multitudes of people who accent their rights rather than their duties. In later life Chief Justice Taft gave a series of lectures on the duties of a citizen. He said that every citizen should be ready and willing to serve on juries; that he should know his voting place in the precinct; that he should be familiar with questions of state which are under political review; and that he should have a knowledge of candidates for office in order that people of character and quality might be chosen for service in legislative, judicial, and executive offices. Justice Taft did not consider democratic duties discharged by merely paying taxes and giving allegiance to laws.

The influence of this changing age on these basic principles of citizenship is diverse and serious. Individual interests are divided among countless objectives; social and economic engagements are multiplied till the citizen suffers chronic fatigue and finally develops an overwhelming tendency to play the great national game of "pass the buck" and "let George do it." This attitude of apathy relative to the use and conservation of the principles of citizenship represents one of the greatest perils threatening American democracy. If you ask, "What is the cure?" the answer, of course, is the cure lies with the individual. In some way we must vitalize the American citizen with the idea that the world of the average person is made up of small things done in a big way. Small things of governmental importance must be regarded by the loyal citizen as a sacred call for his liveliest and most vigorous consideration and support.

In connection with the demand that thoughtful consideration must take the place of apathy in the exercise of citizenship, it is highly important that attention be given to two kinds of thinking - space thinking and time thinking. The terms "space thinking" and "time thinking" should be so clearly understood by us today that no vagueness will exist when we urge discriminating use of these two kinds of thinking.

Space thinking is related to the use of the special sense of sight, expressed by such as, "Look out," "To understand things is to see them as necessary," arresting statements as, "I see your point," "Seeing is believing," so on and so on.

Space thinking is necessary and valuable, but it deals with matter, is stationary, and takes account mainly of the immediate present. It asks no questions about quality, endurance, and succession of processes. Conversely, time thinking is concerned with motion. It makes use of all the senses - sight, hearing, taste, smell, and feeling. It tests everything in all kinds of ways, intelligently, scientifically, psychologically, and philosophically. The mind of the time thinker is dynamic and moving, not static. It employs the technique of Socrates and asks questions. "What does this proposal mean?" "How long will it endure?" "What process will follow the one under consideration?" "Has the proposition quality?" The mind of the time thinker moves with the eternal movement of the universe. It never admits that necessity is supreme or final. The time thinker seeks the only real freedom, the freedom of nature and time. He possesses the historical mind if you admit that "history deals with the present as the growing point of the past into the future."

The highest expression of time thinking is found in the discharge of the duties of a trustee as a citizen of the community, a citizen of the state, the nation, and the world. Trusteeship properly understood and discharged is one of the most vital agencies in the age-long advancement of man from pre-brute savagery to the highest estate of refined culture. If intelligent, honest and effective trusteeship were discharged by all citizens in family life, in common and skilled labor, in business, in professions, in education, in science, in religion, in politics, in statesmanship, in leisure, in culture - in short, in all human relations - there would be a new earth and a new heaven.

To you who cross the shadow-line of youth today there is issued the old palestinian challenge, "Let no man despise thy youth, but be thou an example..." An example of the time thinker, the correct appraiser and defender of the principles of unity, evolution in development of government, liberty, and democratic duty, of the trustee who properly appraises the sacred rights and duties of an American citizen, and who keeps faith with the past, the present, and the future.

In this discussion it is important to define the term, "a civilization." Arnold Toynbee, a "distinguished thinker and scholar," has just finished a course of lectures on "Encounters Between Civilizations," at Bryn Mawr College. He writes: "What do we mean by a civilization?" Clearly, we do mean something, for even before we have

tried to define what our meaning is, this classification of human societies - the Western Civilization, the Islamic, the Far Eastern, the Hindu, and so on - does seem to make sense. These names do call up distinct pictures in our mind in terms of religion, architecture, painting, manners and customs. Still it is better to try to get closer to what we mean by a term which we have already been working so hard. I believe I do know what I mean by a civilization; at least, I am sure I know how I arrived at my own idea of it.

I mean, by a civilization, the smallest unit of historical study at which one arrives when one tries to understand the history of one's own country: The United States, say, or the United Kingdom. If you were to try to understand the history of the United States by itself, it would be unintelligible; you could not understand the part played in American life by federal government, representative government, democracy, industrialism, monogamy, Christianity, unless you looked beyond the bounds of the United States - out beyond her frontiers to Western Europe and the other overseas countries founded by Western Europe, and back beyond her local origins to the history of Western Europe in centuries before Columbus or Cabot had crossed the Atlantic. But to make American history and institutions intelligible for practical purposes, you need not look beyond Western Europe into Eastern Europe or the Islamic World, nor behind the origins of our Western European civilization to the decline and fall of the Graeco-Roman civilization. These limits of time and space give us the intelligible unit of social life of which the United States or Great Britain or France or Holland is a part: call it Western Christendom, Western Civilization, Western Society, the Western World. Similarly, if you start from Greece or Serbia or Russia, and try to understand their histories, you arrive at an Islamic World; start from China or Japan and you find a Far Eastern World.

While the state of which we happen to be citizens makes more concrete and more imperious claims on our allegiance, especially in the present age, the civilization of which we are members really counts far more in our lives. And this civilization of which we are members includes - at most stages in its history - the citizens of other states besides our own. It is older than our own state: the Western Civilization is about thirteen hundred years old, whereas the Kingdom of England is only one thousand years old, the United Kingdom of England and Scotland less than two hundred and fifty, the United States not much more than one hundred and fifty. States are apt to have short lives and sudden deaths. The Western Civilization of which you and

I are members may be alive centuries after the United Kingdom and the United States have disappeared from the political map of the world like their late contemporaries, the Republic of Venice and the Dual Monarchy of Austria-Hungary. This is one of the reasons why I have been asking you to look at history in terms of civilizations, and not terms of states, and to think of states as rather subordinate and ephemeral political phenomena in the lives of the civilizations in whose bosoms they appear and disappear.

"A Civilization" is the resultant of the long continued exercise of "The capacity to rise from bestial savagery to civilization," which Dr. Breasted affirmed was "the greatest fact in the history of the universe." The history of all civilizations is the record of alternating advances and recessions. When the recessions tip the balance too far, the penalty of death terminates that effort of human advancement. The experience of man parallels that of Sisyphus in Greek legend. For his moral failures of treachery and greed, Sisyphus was condemned eternally to roll a heavy stone up a steep hill, you recall. When he neared the top the stone slipped away and rolled down to the bottom of the long hill. Wearily Sisyphus again, and again, and again, throughout the Forever, continued his failures.

These experiences of the Greek slave are strangely duplicated by the builders of civilizations. In February of 1931, during a frightful national depression, I was handed this clipping:

"A Gloomy Moment in History"

"It is a gloomy moment in history. Not for many years has there been so much grave and deep apprehension; never has the future seemed so incalculable as at this time. In our own country there is universal commercial prostration and panic, and thousands of our poorest fellow-citizens are turned out against the approaching winter without employment and without prospect of it.

"In France the political cauldron seethes and bubbles with uncertainty; Russia hangs, as usual, like a cloud, dark and silent, upon the horizon of Europe; while all the energies, resources and influences of the British Empire are sorely in coping with the vast and deadly insurrection, and with its disturbed relations in China and Japan.

"Of our own troubles no man can see the end. They are, fortunately, as yet mainly commercial, and if we are only to lose money and by painful poverty to be taught wisdom - the wisdom of honor, of faith, of sympathy and of charity - no man need seriously despair. And yet the very haste to be rich, which is the occasion of this widespread calamity, has also tended to destroy the moral forces with which we are to



resist and subdue the calamity."

The above paragraphs are quoted from Harper's Weekly for October 10, 1857. They might have been written today, the situations are so nearly identical. Since that date our country has gone through four other major depressions. Examine the instances in each case carefully, says Nation's Business, and you will find that each one has contributed something to business stability.

Another pivotal date in the history of man on earth, more significant than the discovery of fire, is December 2, 1942. On that occasion a few scientists shared in an experiment directed by Physicist Enrico Fermi at the University of Chicago. He "set up a chain reaction for the release of nuclear energy from uranium atoms."

Again, for the first time in the history of the universe "an amazing new capability" of man emerged. What will be its significance in "The Conquest of Civilization?" If this astronomic power is used for improving the well being of all men everywhere it will contribute immeasurably to man's emancipation from every form of slavery, economic, social and political. "The thing for us to fear today is not the atom but the nature of man, lest he lose either his conscience or his humility before the inherent mystery of things. We can abolish warfare, and mitigate man's inhumanity to man. But all this will take some doing, and we are in a strange land."

The only possible reassuring answer to the question "what will be the significance of released nuclear energy to civilization" will come from philosophy. If the correct philosophy is used as a guide to life at home and abroad then there will be industrial, domestic and foreign peace and goodwill among all men everywhere on earth.

Dr. F.S.C. Northrop, Professor of Philosophy in Yale University, has published a book entitled "The Meeting of East and West," "An Inquiry Concerning World Understanding." Able reviewers consider it "The most important intellectual event in the United States in 1946." Its scope is almost as vast as Spengler's, and it is more applicable to the crisis of our times.

He writes cogently about men, culture and the state in relation to theories of knowledge. The book is great because its theme is great. It is important because it states the fundamental ideological conflicts in world culture. It is difficult because the problem is immense. If the East can be 'westernized' in the sense that economic and inner freedom are assured to its millions through Western science; if the West can be 'easternized' in the sense that it can rethink its current theories of knowledge, there is hope for the resolution of cultural conflicts. Aside from this program, Dr. Northrop sees little hope for abiding peace.

"Dr. Northrop's object is to find some method of reconciling superficially hostile philosophies, to bring together in fundamentals the medieval and modern, communism and democracy, Catholicism and Protestantism, east and west. Each has something it should discard and each something it should preserve. This book will be a powerful aid in showing how the present world confusion may be resolved. It is the sort of volume capable of changing the face of the world."

As for us citizens in a Changing Civilization, let us be reasonably skeptical, and use "time thinking" steadily and honestly in all of our economic, social, industrial, religious and political relations in our home and foreign relations. Let us heed John Ruskins philosophy - "not merely do the right thing but enjoy the right things; not merely learned but love knowledge; not merely industrious but love industry; not merely just but hunger and thirst after justice."

For today and all of our long tomorrows let us of the West be cheered and inspired by Douglas Malloch's "The West."

#### THE WEST

Men look to the East for the dawning things,  
For the light of a rising sun;  
But they look to the West, to the crimson West,  
For things that are done, are done!  
The eastward sun is a new-made hope from the  
Dark of the night distilled;  
But the westward sun is a sunset sun,  
Is the sun of a hope fulfilled!

So out of the East they have always come,  
The cradle that saw the birth  
Of all of the heart-warm hopes of man  
And of all of the hopes of earth.  
For out of the East a Christ arose,  
And out of the East there gleamed,  
The dearest dream and the clearest dream,  
That ever a prophet dreamed.

Yea, into the waiting West they go  
With the dream-child of the East,  
And find the hopes that they hoped of old  
Are a hundred fold increased.  
For there in the East we dream our dreams  
Of the things we hope to do,  
And here in the West, the crimson West,  
The dreams of the East come true!

--Douglas Malloch