

ALSO BY MR. AND MRS. LYND:
Middletown: A Study in Contemporary American Culture

MIDDLETOWN IN TRANSITION

A Study in Cultural Conflicts

BY

Robert S. Lynd & Helen Merrell Lynd

300

L99m



Harcourt, Brace and Company
New York

COPYRIGHT, 1937, BY
HARCOURT, BRACE AND COMPANY, INC.

*All rights reserved, including
the right to reproduce this book
or portions thereof in any form.*

Second printing, April, 1937

HN
57
.L84
1937a
216546

VIEWED
APR 10 1937

PRINTED IN THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA
BY QUINN & BODEN COMPANY, INC., RAHWAY, N. J.

CONTENTS

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS	vii
PREFACE	ix
I. MIDDLETOWN REVISITED	3
II. GETTING A LIVING	7
III. THE X FAMILY: A PATTERN OF BUSINESS-CLASS CONTROL	74
IV. CARING FOR THE UNABLE DURING THE DEPRESSION: BENCH MARKS FOR SOCIAL CHANGE	102
V. MAKING A HOME: THE ARENA OF PRIVATE ADJUSTMENT	144
VI. TRAINING THE YOUNG	204
VII. SPENDING LEISURE	242
VIII. RELIGION	295
IX. THE MACHINERY OF GOVERNMENT	319
X. GETTING INFORMATION: THE PRESS	373
XI. KEEPING HEALTHY	388
XII. "THE MIDDLETOWN SPIRIT"	402
XIII. MIDDLETOWN FACES BOTH WAYS	487
APPENDIX I. THE SIZE OF THE CITY: 1925-1935	515
APPENDIX II. MIDDLETOWN'S BANKING INSTITUTIONS IN BOOM AND DEPRESSION	519
APPENDIX III. TABLES (For list of tables see pp. 525-28)	525
INDEX	581

of town" and to move on to larger cities. This psychological desire seemed more prevalent in 1935 than a decade ago, but the outward flow had ceased and the tide was even reversed. Early in the depression, many of them had tried to leave, most of them to return later after beating the streets of larger cities looking for jobs or trying to sell Fuller brushes. As the depression has worn on, while the desire to migrate has increased, the nearer side of the road has also come to look more attractive to some. For the most part, young Middletown is just "sticking around." And yet the repetitiveness of this familiar round of life among neighbors may become acutely distasteful if either of man's great peacetime anodynes for routine—marriage and work—are denied him. This is precisely the predicament of many of these Middletown youngsters in their twenties. They have no work and some of them feel they cannot marry, despite the heavy tradition of early marriage in Middletown; and it is not merely the hoped-for chance of a job that beckons them away but the outward thrust of too much spare time seeing the same small group of people over and over and doing the same thing day after day. The element of repetition is always high in the small community. One social set of half-a-dozen couples in Middletown, disliking the clichés of the larger business-class social life, are trying to develop their own social life. They have jobs and some of them are married, but after visiting round and round and "getting all talked out, there's been nothing for us to do but to take to drink."

Middletown likes to solve all these depressing things by the thought that "The pendulum will swing back soon." It seems probable, however, that as more and more of the city's dissident young are backed up within Middletown in a possible period of more or less chronic job stringency, the city will have to accommodate relatively more of these diverging minority groups, and small city life may become a more diversified thing. Against the possible thrust of such a broadened base of young dissenters, however, the slow aging of the entire population should be borne in mind. Middletown, in common with the rest of the country, is having fewer children and the average age of its people is rising. The conservative weight of the growing share of its population over forty will tend to offset some at least of the mounting restlessness of the young.

CHAPTER XIII

Middletown Faces Both Ways

THE PRECEDING chapters have sought to make explicit the elements of permanence and of change in Middletown as the city has met with four types of experience peculiarly conducive to cultural change: sudden and great strain on its institutions, widespread dislocation of individual habits, pressure for change from the larger culture surrounding it, and at some points the actual implementing from without of a changed line of action. These ten years of boom and depression might be expected to leave permanent marks on the culture.

The boom experiences were not essentially different in kind from those Middletown had known before: optimism, growth, making money—these things are in the city's main stream of tradition. Such an experience as climbing to the very verge of the long-expected population of 50,000 contained elements of novelty and has, despite the depression, left a permanent deposit in the city in the form of increased self-regard. The prosperity of the fat years, while sharpening the disappointments of the depression, also remains today in Middletown in the form of enhanced personal goals and glimpsed new psychological standards of living for many of its citizens. The fact that Middletown does not regard the depression as in any sense "its own fault," or even the fault of the economy by which it lives, makes it easy for the city to think of the confusion following 1929 as "just a bad bump in the road," one of those inevitable occurrences that spoil things temporarily but do not last. The gold-rush scramble back to confidence which the research staff witnessed in 1935 was the inevitable result of such a rationale of the depression. Middletown was in effect saying, albeit soberly and decidedly anxiously: "It's all over, thank God! And now we'll get after all those things we were planning for ourselves in 1928-29!" In a culture built on money, the experience of better homes, better cars, winter vacations in Florida, and better educated children dies hard; and while some people's hopes, especially among the work-

ing class, have been mashed out permanently by the depression, the influential business group who determine the wave length of Middletown's articulate hopes are today busily broadcasting the good news that everything is all right again.

The depression experiences contained more outright novelty than did the years 1925-29:

A city exultantly preoccupied with the question, "How fast can we make even more money?" was startled by being forced to shift its central concern for a period of years to the stark question, "Can we manage to keep alive?"

A city living excitedly *at* a future which all signs promised would be golden lived for a while *in* the present with its exigent demands.

A city living by the faith that everyone can and should support himself lived through a period of years in which it had to confess that at least temporarily a quarter of its population could not get work.

A city intensely opposed to society's caring for able-bodied people has taxed itself to support for an indefinitely long period one in every four of its families.

A city that has chronically done without many manifestly needed civic improvements, on the philosophy that it does no good to hunt up and plan desirable things to do because there isn't any money to pay for them, has lived for a time in a world in which not money but ability to plan and carry out progress was the limiting factor.

A city built around the theory of local autonomy has lived in a world experiencing rapid centralization of administrative authority and marked innovations in the interference by these centralized agencies in local affairs.

A city that lives by the thought that it is one big cooperating family has had the experience of a wholesale effort by its working class to organize against its business class under sponsorship from Washington.

A city committed to faith in education as the key to its children's future has had to see many of its college-trained sons and daughters idle, and to face the question as to what education is really "worth."

A city devoted to the doctrine that "Work comes first," to an extent that has made many of its citizens scarcely able to play, has faced the presence of enforced leisure and heard people talk of "the new leisure." Civically, the community has begun to state positively the problem of the leisure of the mass of its people, and to make wider provision for popular leisure pursuits.

A city still accustomed to having its young assume largely the values of their parents has had to listen to an increasing number of its young speak of the world of their parents as a botched mess.

A city in which the "future" has always been painted in terms of its gayer-hued hopes has been forced to add to its pigments the somber dark tones of its fears.

Experiences such as these partake in their cumulative effect of the crisis quality of a serious illness, when life's customary busy immediacies drop away and one lies helplessly confronting oneself, reviewing the past, and asking abrupt question of the future. What has Middletown learned from its crisis and partial convalescence?

Chapter I stated some of the larger questions of this sort which the research staff took to Middletown in June, 1935. The broad answer to these questions is that basically the texture of Middletown's culture has not changed. Those members of the research staff who had expected to find sharp differences in group alignments within the city, in ways of thinking, or feeling, or carrying on the multifarious daily necessities of life, found little to support their hypotheses. Middletown is overwhelmingly living by the values by which it lived in 1925; and the chief additions are defensive, negative elaborations of already existing values, such as, among the business class, intense suspicion of centralizing tendencies in government, of the interference of social legislation with business, of labor troubles, and of radicalism. Among the working class, tenuous and confused new positive values are apparent in such a thing as the aroused conception of the possible role of government in bolstering the exposed position of labor by social legislation, including direct relief for the unemployed. But, aside from these, no major new symbols or ideologies of a positive sort have developed as conspicuous rallying points. Leadership in the community has not shifted in kind, but has become more concentrated in the same central group observed in 1925. The different rates of change pointed out in the earlier study as occurring in the different areas of living have not altered materially:¹ economic activities have set the pace and determined the cadence of these years, though the changes have not differed in kind over these ten years anything like so sharply as during the thirty-five-year period covered in the earlier study; in

¹ See *Middletown*, p. 497.

terms of actual rate of change and radical quality of innovation, the institutions concerned with care for the unable leaped into the lead during the depression, although Middletown likes to regard the changes in this area as "purely emergency and temporary" in character; education, leisure, and the relations among family members have exhibited some changes; while the city's local government and religion have remained as before most resistant of all its institutions to change.

With the exception of the widespread innovations in caring for the unemployed, which by 1936 were already contracting their scope, a map of Middletown's culture shows today much the same contours as before; no wholly new hills and valleys appear save in this "temporary" provision for the unemployed and the resulting new public works; the configuration is the same. Even the fault lines which appear today and show signs of developing into major fissures within the community were faintly visible in 1925. In the main, a Rip Van Winkle, fallen asleep in 1925 while addressing Rotary or the Central Labor Union, could have awakened in 1935 and gone right on with his interrupted address to the same people with much the same ideas.

Such changes as are going forward in Middletown are disguised by the thick blubber of custom that envelops the city's life. The city is uneasily conscious of many twinges down under the surface, but it resembles the person who insists on denying and disregarding unpleasant physical symptoms on the theory that everything *must* be all right, and that if anything really is wrong it may cure itself without leading to a major operation. The conflicts under the surface in Middletown are not so much new as more insistent, more difficult to avoid, harder to smooth over. Many of these latent conflicts, aggravated by the depression and now working themselves toward the surface of the city's life, have been pointed out in the preceding pages: conflicts among values hitherto held as compatible; conflicts among institutions—economic and political, economic and educational and religious, economic and familial; conflicts among groups in the community breaking through the symbols of the unified city; conflicts between deep-rooted ideas of individual and collective responsibility; conflicts, above all, between symbols and present reality.

The physical and personal continuities of life are relatively great in the small community, and the average dweller in such a community probably has a sense of "belonging" that is qualitatively somewhat different from that of the big-city dweller. The institutions in the

small city tend to be familiar and, with the help of many assumptions of long standing as to how they are linked together and operate, a quality of simplicity is imparted to them in the minds of local people. By assuming continuities and similarities, this simplicity is interpreted outward to include "American life" and "American institutions."

One of the major elements of conflict imparted by the depression to Middletown has been the injection of a new sense of the inescapable complexity of this assumedly simple world. As indicated earlier, the more alert Middletown people met the depression with an earnest desire to "understand" it—only to be thrown back later, in many instances, with a sense that it was "too big" for them and that all they could do was to try to stick to their jobs and save their own skins. One suspects that for the first time in their lives many Middletown people have awakened, in the depression, from a sense of being at home in a familiar world to the shock of living as an atom in a universe dangerously too big and blindly out of hand. With the falling away of literal belief in the teachings of religion in recent decades, many Middletown folk have met a similar shock, as the simpler universe of fifty years ago has broken up into a vastly complicated physical order; but, there, they have been able to retain the shadowy sense of their universe's being in beneficent control by the common expedient of believing themselves to live in a world of unresolved duality, in which one goes about one's daily affairs without thought of religion but relies vaguely on the ultimates in life being somehow divinely "in hand." In the economic order, however, it is harder for Middletown to brush aside the shock by living thus on two largely unconnected levels, for the economic out-of-handness is too urgently threatening to daily living.

So Middletown tries to forget and to disregard the growing disparities in the midst of which it lives. Its adult population has, through its socially gay youth and busy adult life, resisted the patient scrutiny of problems and the teasing out of their less obvious antecedents and implications. As a local man remarked in 1924 in commenting on the pressure of modern living, "We've lost the ability to ponder over life. We're too busy." And, if in the boom days Middletown was "too busy" to ponder, it was too worried to do so in the depression. It is quite characteristic, for instance, that, as one woman remarked in 1935, "We never get down to talking about things like the coming of fascism. The only time we ever talk about any of those things is when we

comment on a radio program." Rather than ponder such things, Middletown prefers either to sloganize or to personalize its problems. And the more the disparities have forced themselves to attention, the more things have seemed "too big" and "out of hand," the more Middletown has inclined to heed the wisdom of sticking to one's private business² and letting the uncomfortable "big problems" alone save for a few encompassing familiar slogans. Where Middletown cannot avoid these big problems and must on occasion present at least the semblance of a balance in this system of nonbalancing intellectual book-keeping, it is resorting increasingly to the suppression of detailed entries and to the presentation of only the alleged totals.

One frequently gets a sense of people's being afraid to let their opinions become sharp. They believe in "peace, but—." They believe in "fairness to labor, but—." In "freedom of speech, but—." In "democracy, but—." In "freedom of the press, but—." This is in part related to the increased apprehensiveness that one feels everywhere in Middletown: fear on the part of teachers of the D.A.R. and the Chamber of Commerce; fear by businessmen of high taxes and public ownership of utilities and of the Roosevelt administration; fear by laborers of joining unions lest they lose their jobs; fear by office-holders wanting honest government of being framed by the politicians; fear by everyone to show one's hand, or to speak out.

But this process of avoiding issues goes on less and less fluently. With a widening gap between symbol and practice in the most immediate concerns of living, there are more forced choices as to where one's emphasis is to be placed. Middletown wants to be adventurous and to embrace new ideas and practices, but it also desperately needs security, and in this conflict both businessmen and workingmen appear to be clinging largely to tried sources of security rather than venturing out into the untried. Middletown people want to be kind, friendly, expansive, loyal to each other, to make real the idea of a friendly city working together for common ends; but, in a business world where one is struggling for self-preservation, or for power and prestige as a

² Middletown receives ample encouragement in this congenial resolution of its problems. It read, for instance, on page one, column one, of its morning paper the following eloquent sermon by Arthur Brisbane on the prize fighter, Gene Tunney: "Seest thou a man diligent in his business, he shall stand before kings." Tunney was diligent in his business, learned to know it thoroughly and now stands before kings, at least money kings. It is very important to know one thing thoroughly."

supposed means to self-preservation, warm personal relations, like the more fastidious sorts of integrity, may tend to become a luxury and be crowded to the wall. If necessary, one dispenses with affection. People want to continue to live hopefully and adventurously into the future, but if the future becomes too hazardous they look steadily toward the known past.³

On the surface, then, Middletown is meeting such present issues and present situations as it cannot escape by attempting to revert to the old formulas: we must always believe that things are good and that they will be better, and we must stress their hopeful rather than their pessimistic aspects. This leads to the stating of such social problems as may arise defensively and negatively⁴—rather than to engaging in a positive program for social analysis and reconstruction. It is still true in 1936 that, to Middletown, such things as poverty or a depression are simply exceptions to a normally good state of affairs; and anything that goes wrong is the fault of some individuals (or, collectively, of "human nature") rather than anything amiss with the organization and functioning of the culture. The system is fundamentally right and only the persons wrong; the cures must be changes in personal attitudes, not in the institutions themselves. Among these personal cures for its social woes are the following six basic qualities needed for a better world outlined in a local address: "faith, service, cooperation, the Golden Rule, optimism, and character." "The typical citizen," says an editorial approvingly, "discounts the benefits of the political and economic New Deal and says that common sense is the answer to the depression. . . . He thinks hard work is the depression cure." Or again, "If profits are low, it is still possible to get a good deal of

³ As pointed out in Chs. II and XII, Middletown's working class appears today to be less sure of many of the old values than is the business class; but in Middletown they have developed no ideology of their own, and they lack security on any basis of their own, such as labor organization. Hence, doubtful and uncertain, they tend to straggle after the wealthier, pace-setting fellow citizens in their affirmations of established values in the midst of confusion.

⁴ See the discussion of the handling of the relief problem in Ch. IV.

In keeping with this tendency to state its problems defensively and negatively, Middletown tends to avoid facing the implications of differences between its practices and those of other communities by recourse to the easy extenuations that "Our situation is different," or that a given problem "is just one of the peculiar problems that our community has always had to cope with." Such reasoning allows local practice to continue its course along the smooth grooves of past custom.

enjoyment by doing the best possible under adverse circumstances and by taking pride in our work."

This marked tendency in Middletown's thought and feeling to see the place where remedial change is needed in individual people and not in its institutions helps to ease its tension over local political corruption and other shortcomings in the midst of which it lives. Its faith in the ultimate quality and final perfection of its institutions is thus left intact, and its Christian emphasis upon the need to spur on weak and faltering human nature to that perfecting of itself "which all history proves to be slowly taking place" makes the individual shoulder the whole burden of blame. Over and over again one sees Middletown following this line of reasoning. Thus, for instance, the reason Middletown's business class is unable to see any sense in such a concept as "class differences" is that it recognizes no relevant basis for "classes" in the institutional system. And it does not recognize them because, according to its way of viewing things, "getting ahead" is a personal matter. The institutions are there, fixed and final in their major aspects, and the individual must struggle to make them work and to be more worthy of them. Once one gets this point of view, Middletown's rationale of "the rich" as "social benefactors," and of "the iniquity of the New Deal" becomes apparent. One can see why Middletown feels the rightness of recent editorials in its press such as the following:

LET'S GIVE THE RICH A REST

It is popular just now to assail the wealthy, and unpopular to defend them, and yet most of the economic progress that America has made would have been impossible had this not always been a land of opportunity for those who wish to make money without undue restrictions upon their gains. . . . Thousands of boys reared in poverty have become millionaires through their own ability, through their unbridled ambitions, and in becoming so have supplied occupations and the comforts of life to many times the number of thousands who have acquired the millions.

Instead of laying all our troubles upon those who have had the talent and the brains to become wealthy, why not each of us assume our share of responsibility for the economic situation of the nation?

MONEY-MAKING THE BIG INCENTIVE

The way to make both the poor man and the rich man poorer is to tax wealth so greatly that it loses its incentive to produce. . . .

ON THE "SOCKING" OF THE RICH

Who remembers when the American boy was taught he had as good an opportunity to become wealthy as the town's richest man had at the same age? And when the rich, while perhaps they were envied by others, were thought worthy of emulation? When riches were not considered a disgrace but an honor, and millions would have died rather than accept charity?

Now the demagogues, the social outcasts, the unsuccessful, the lazy, the ambitionless, the ignorant all join in a swelling chorus in denunciation of those who by their work and ability have acquired more of the world's goods than others have been able to obtain, making no distinction between the wealth that has come by reason of intelligence, hard work, and thrift and that which has been obtained through trickery and fraud. . . . So we preach the doctrine of "socking" the rich, because the majority of us are not rich and are not likely ever to be rich, since the majority have not the ability, even given the opportunity, to acquire great wealth.

But without great accumulations of centralized capital America today would be almost wholly a nation of farmers, instead of being divided between agriculture and industry. Except for centralized capital, how could great factories be constructed, great buildings be erected, hospitals built and maintained, vast charities be supported, scientific investigations be made, and the results of such investigations given free to the world!

To men holding the philosophy these editorials reveal, efforts in Washington or elsewhere to make changes in *institutions* by which men live constitute a misguided assault on the one source of strength and progress within a nation, namely, the personal drive within the individual to accumulate wealth and to "better himself." "Progress," according to this philosophy, is a by-product of the pursuit of wealth.

The essentially instrumental character of Middletown's living noted earlier—namely, its emphasis upon the "future," "saving," "trying to get somewhere in life," and so on, as over against the present quality of living—tends to augment its tension over emerging conflicts. This sort of instrumental living puts a heavy premium upon assumed simplicity and reliability in the underlying institutional system. One can hardly live confidently at the future unless one assumes a guaranteed highway; if one assumes the broad, sure highway, one need not concern oneself too much over dusty inadequacies in the present, because the road mounts surely just around the next bend; but if one questions the very existence of a sure highway "as some radicals and

long-haired thinkers do," then what is to become of all the virtues of fortitude and hard work! A culture thus committed to instrumental living tends, because emotionally it so badly needs to do so, to do with its present difficulties along the road precisely what Middletown has tended to do with the depression, *i.e.*, to regard it as just an unduly stiff bit in the road. And only with great difficulty or as a result of prolonged discouragement will it do what a minority of Middletown's working class are beginning to do—ask whether the road is really leading anywhere, whether after all it is the best possible road, or even whether the present isn't a good time and place to recognize one's difficulties and to begin to face them.

Loudly as Middletown affirms and reaffirms all its hopeful, ameliorative beliefs, the "Down here under our vests we're scared to death" note was heard again and again in 1935 when business-class or working-class people were talking unofficially. Some of its tensions it had been unable to overlook, to sloganize away, or to brush aside as merely personal frailties subject to correction as men become "better." The long pull of the depression had even prompted occasional rare questions as to whether the system itself was as sound as Middletown liked to believe. An editorial in mid-1933 on "Machines and the Human Equation" had stated:

We have been making society mechanical instead of making machinery social. We have to humanize our mechanized industries by putting human values above material values and the real welfare of all above the false welfare of the few. . . . What is needed here is social engineering.

An even bolder editorial (in the afternoon paper—it could hardly have appeared in the morning paper) about the same time, remarking on the suicide of an unemployed man, had said under the unfamiliar caption, "The Right to Live by Work":

Why should anybody wipe himself out of existence because he has no money? Have we set up some kind of a false standard of value? . . . Someday and somehow, finally, we are going to straighten these things out. You may call the new order by anything you please, but it is coming. The inherent right of every man and woman who is willing to do his part to maintain reasonable social conditions, which means to live decently, cannot be gainsaid by any system. That is basic. Let us not fool ourselves by thinking the old systems are to be continued indefinitely. . . . The

right of a willing man to work and live by his labor is paramount. There is nothing else important.

Although the official front had recovered its flawless exterior by 1935, Middletown people knew that they had been living for a while in a world that made more natural the raising of such questions. The acute concerns of the depression were dropping somewhat behind, but over the contours of the city stood out the bench marks of depression experience. And Middletown was afraid, even as it whooped things up over "the return of prosperity"; and perhaps it whooped things up the more just because it was afraid.

Week after week during 1935 the outside radio was bringing in talks by men like Father Coughlin and Huey Long. Over the air came into the cottages and even into many business-class homes points of view not allowed to appear in a favorable light in the local press. "I'm surprised," commented a businessman, "at the number of intelligent people who listen to Father Coughlin and believe he talks sense. Curiously, too, people don't seem to resent his being a Catholic." Down at Pop Alexander's South Side beer hall men talked freely and favorably of Father Coughlin, and some South Side families had his emblems in their homes. On the South Side, too, Huey Long's slogan, "Share the wealth," elicited loyalty. Some working people expressed their willingness to "follow any kind of man who stands for that."⁵

As this goes to press, Middletown has just come through what many of its people regarded as the most critical national election within the memory of anyone now living in the city. The weight of frightened hope with which the city's leading businessmen backed Landon to defeat Roosevelt was almost literally beyond exaggeration—and, even more than in previous elections, the employers were prepared to go to

⁵ Huey Long did not have as good a standing in Middletown as Father Coughlin. "People don't trust him and his power is waning here," remarked a businessman in 1935. "People here dislike him morally, and they hold against him that rowdy fistfight down at the Sands Point Casino on Long Island." Another businessman put it even more bluntly: "[Middletown] thinks Huey Long rough and crude and a damned fool. Strange as it may seem, this community puts some emphasis on dignity. [Middletown] likes a smooth politician—even south of the tracks."

The Townsend plan was not being discussed in Middletown at the time of the field work. Lemke, as Table 46 shows, polled in 1936 but 187 votes in Middletown's entire county.

great lengths to contrive to make their employees "vote right."⁶ To these businessfolk this particular election was a holy crusade; if Landon and the Republican party had won, a cool, cleansing sponge, they felt, would have wiped out all their nightmare memories of four years of New Deal flaunting of American ideals and security.

With its characteristic proclivity for resolving issues into stark blacks and whites and personalizing each within the manageable compass of a devil or a savior, business leaders in Middletown see in Roosevelt all that they are against, the personified denial of all their wants and of all the virtues of the pioneer tradition. There is infinitely more than "campaign talk" behind an editorial like the following appearing in June, 1936; these Middletown businessmen think their backs are squarely against the wall:

TO PREACH HATRED OF THE RICH

"To preach hatred of the rich man as such [said Theodore Roosevelt] . . . is to seek to mislead and inflame to madness honest men whose lives are hard and who have not the kind of mental training which will permit them to appreciate the danger in the doctrines preached. All this is to commit a crime against the body politic and to be false to every worthy principle and tradition of American national life."

In the New Deal lexicon, anybody who has been industrious enough to accumulate two dollars to clink against each other, who has been thrifty enough to save some money for the inevitable rainy day, who has acquired wealth in order that he might employ it to give jobs to others seems to have become, per se, a dangerous character who should be suppressed. . . . Franklin D. Roosevelt, chief of the New Dealers, is asking that the only persons who can give private jobs and keep business going be mulcted of the means for doing the very thing the President is thunderously demanding. . . .

Theodore Roosevelt realized the necessity of the existence of capital if the American people are to prosper. . . . *He did not seek to inflame the masses against the very men upon whom, finally, the prosperity of all the people depended in so large part.*

Theodore Roosevelt regarded rich men and corporations as custodians of

⁶ See *Middletown*, pp. 415-16, and also Ch. IX above. As noted in Ch. IX, these efforts to influence votes actually overreached themselves, stirred up suspicion and resentment, and ended in many cases by creating votes for Roosevelt. Middletown even began to joke about the situation. Humorous stories flew about town, e.g., about the man down at the X plant who broke his leg falling over the pile of Landon buttons discarded by the men outside the plant door.

wealth, most of whom possessed the special business skill needed—with some government supervision, to be sure—to keep the ship of state upon an even economic keel. He did not think that college professors were skilled enough to take over business.

Theodore Roosevelt, with a sincere love of his fellows in all walks of life and with the ardent wish to promote the welfare of the lowliest as well as the highest in the social scale, nevertheless was a practical man. . . . He thought straight. There was no warp nor crook in his logic.

And with what disgust would he have observed the attempt today to array class against class, to make fine theories take the place of sensible practices! [Italics ours.]

In the view of Middletown's business leaders, there has been "an insane man in the White House," with "our best mindless thinkers advising him." The bitterness of speeches before civic clubs and of statements in the casual conversations of businessmen, and the monotonous, shrill efforts by the two daily papers to mobilize local public opinion greatly surpass the quieter conservatism met with in 1925:

"We businessmen here aren't just a bunch of Tories," commented a local banker heatedly, "but we're scared to death that a lot of reckless political wild men will take everything away from us. We believe in change and know it's going on. We believe in looking ahead, but we don't believe in trying to do it all at once. It'll take two or three hundred years to get the perfect state. Change is slow and big changes won't come in our lifetime, so meanwhile we intend to go ahead and not worry too much about what these changes will be or ought to be.

"And we *know* politics. Have you seen our Congressman? You can size him up by just looking at him! Look [pulling a sheet from his desk], here's an application of the brother of our Negro janitor for a C.C.C. job. The boy's a graduate of Tuskegee. See here, the first four recommendations he has to send in on the back of this application are his district leader, then two more local politicians, and finally his state political boss. We businessmen see this rotten political business everywhere, in all these alphabet organizations in [Middletown]; the word comes down the line from Washington—it's just party politics.

"We've no faith in Roosevelt—his angel wings and smiling words cover up a worse political machine than Hoover ever had. He isn't honest—he talks one way and acts another. He has no courage—or rather courage at the wrong time. He isn't fit to be President and can't hold a candle to Hoover. I've been reading the articles in the *Saturday Evening Post*⁷ about

⁷ These are the articles referred to in n. 60 in Ch. XII.

the depression, and they're right—I know from our banking connections with New York and Chicago.

"Sure we need planning. But these bright boys that jam Washington don't know their stuff. Who's a big enough man to plan? We businessmen are afraid of bureaucrats and planners. I've walked through Washington offices, and I never saw so much loafing in a business office. Now a business outfit like the American Telephone and Telegraph Company plans, but what do *they* do? They don't rush into experiments all over. They try an experiment in a single state. And look at the controls they have over them! Their common stockholders control them, and if they don't make money, they're turned out. But government employees don't have to make money.

"All these big plans they're making in Washington look well, read well—but they just won't work. They're Utopian, and we don't live and try to do business in a Utopia! By what God-given right do these fellows in Washington think they can do a job so big? It's the very immensity of national planning that makes it impossible. The old law of supply and demand can't be repealed or amended. It applies to labor and to materials, raw and finished. Roosevelt's like a general who sits at the top and hands down orders from man to man till they get to the privates sweating under a sixty-pound pack—and he's the fellow that carries out the order.

"You can't make the world all planned and soft. The strongest and best survive—that's the law of nature after all—always has been and always will be."

From this vision of catastrophe, Middletown's business leaders turned back terrified to "the old ways—the American way" embodied in "Landon, the Careful Kansan." Here Middletown saw its own "middle-of-the-road" image reflected reassuringly back to it. As the following somewhat careful, because pre-nomination, editorial in early June of 1936 indicates, here was a man who, business-class Middletown was prepared to believe, thinks and feels as it does:

ESTIMATE OF "ALF" LANDON

"Alf" Landon is without any important political career behind him. He is not especially attractive of personality, his radio voice is poor, he never has accomplished big things in any given line of thought and endeavor, his qualities of statesmanship are yet to be discovered, his knowledge of economics is uncertain, . . . but the people seem to believe he is utterly honest. Given utter honesty, other things appear unimportant.

Maybe "Alf" Landon is not a statesman. . . . Maybe he knows more about drilling an oil well in wildcat territory and striking it lucky than

he knows about the proper sartorial accouterment for our ambassador to the Court of St. James. . . . But the people of the United States, beyond doubt, have the conception that he is "square" in a time of many governmental intrigues: that he has common sense with which to combat the subtleties of the theories advanced by the professorial bloc at Washington. . . . Maybe we should be gradually settling down to this business of having common sense in government, and maybe "Alf" Landon is the new prophet. . . .

Landon has two advantages as a candidate. One of them is that he has a very short record in public service and, therefore, is little known. The other is that he speaks the language of the common people. If there is a third it is . . . that he has the common sense that is the inheritance of those who live in the Midwestern prairies.

Even on the eve of the election, leaders in Middletown's business class hoped for victory. On October 28, one of the X brothers announced that "Defeatism is gone. . . . We go into the closing days of the campaign determined to achieve our goal of true American government . . . as opposed to radicalism, waste, and dictatorial powers." The day before election, a long editorial warned Middletown solemnly:

BUT IT COULD HAPPEN HERE

One who goes to the polls Tuesday should do so with a feeling of the solemn obligation that rests upon him and with thankfulness in his heart that THUS FAR he still has a privilege that is denied to most of the peoples of the earth—the privilege to play his part in government. In spite of attempts at regimenting about everybody in America in the last three and a half years, the voter is still free to cast his ballot as he sees fit.

A dictatorship may come to America, as it has come to other nations; our freedom may be destroyed or greatly limited. . . .

A good deal has been said in this campaign as to whether we Americans are to retain the American plan of government—a plan that has been more successful than any that ever has been tried. Under it the United States grew great and rich and prosperous. The plan contemplates the restoration of good times UNDER THE LAWS OF FREEDOM AND INDIVIDUAL ENTERPRISE. That is the path we have taken down the years, and it has been a good path. The plan has not been perfect, of course, for no plan of government is that, nor is one ever likely to be that has to take into account human frailties and human proneness to err. But we can say of it truthfully that it has proved to be the BEST PLAN any nation ever has tried. . . .

"It can't happen here?" . . .

THIS THING COULD NOT HAVE HAPPENED TO GERMANY—BUT IT DID HAPPEN. [Here followed a recital of the plight of Italy and Russia.] Nor do we know from week to week what may happen to France now that Communism has become so powerful a factor there.

So it is no idle fear that comes to us in America that we, too, some day may suffer the fate of these other nations from which the last vestige of liberty has departed. Nor can we quiet ourselves by the thought that the American plan of government will continue.

The way tomorrow's election goes may have a great deal to do with the maintenance of this American plan of government unsullied.

IT CAN HAPPEN HERE!

It is difficult to say what Middletown's 59 per cent majority for Roosevelt in 1936 means. The local press is inclined to take it philosophically as one of those occasional blind acts of nature; editorially the vote is spoken of as an "avalanche" and an "earthquake." Despite the city's long record of Republican majorities, most of Middletown looks upon the quadrennial national election as it does upon a horse race: in all such things occasional upsets will occur, in the nature of things. The easy tolerance of these people is great, their ability to adjust and to "make the best of" situations almost unlimited. There are grounds, therefore, for brushing aside the local result of the 1936 election as of little permanent significance. Certainly it does not signify the presence of "radicalism" or of a desire for drastic change. The vote for minority, left-wing parties through the entire county was less than 1 per cent of the total. Implicit in the vote were all of the following in varying degrees: a belief that things were at least better in 1936 than they had been four years before, the experience of positive relief aid from Washington, a vague feeling on the part of the numerical majority who constitute the working class that a government may be something than can operate on *their* side in *their* behalf, reaction against the forceful tactics of business leaders in the campaign, and in some cases the settling of scores "against the X family" and their dominance in local affairs.

To an unparalleled extent the election of 1936 probably represented to Middletown people the chance to do something for personal security. And it is the different views of different sections of Middletown's population as to where security lies *for them* that gives to this election such significance as it may prove in future to have had. Despite the tendency of Middletown folk to look upon presidential elections good-

naturally as "a bit of excitement, after which we all settle down again and resume whatever we were doing before," a definite sense of local "class differences" has been generated by the election by reason of its acute depression background, the activity of the Federal government in helping to meet local problems, and the resulting diverging class views as to where security for individuals in different strata of the population lies.

As noted elsewhere, there is but little evidence of the emergence in Middletown of any clear sense of class solidarity among the working people. Likewise, the fifty-fifty vote of the middle-class folk of small income reveals their ambivalence, though, again, it is possibly significant of their growing uneasiness as to where *their* security lies that so many of them refused to side with the big-business group on the unusually acute issues presented by the campaign.

For the more coherent group of business leaders, however, the situation is far otherwise. One sees here a financially and socially dominant group of leaders of the city, men who usually dominate the opinion of the city in terms of the public interest as they interpret it, groggy and ill-tempered with seven years of denied hope, and now thwarted in the hope that was to end fear and the need for hope. They confront a city in which the usually docile six to seven in every ten in the population who make up the working class have "gotten out of hand" and asserted their numerical predominance. These earnest, hard-working, able businessmen read in their afternoon paper the post-election comment by the editor:

I talked with the manager of a great industry not long ago who put it this way: "The big hogs are letting the little pigs up to the trough. They know that if they don't they'll all be little pigs pretty soon, for the big hogs will be butchered."

Faced with the necessity to "endure four more years of Roosevelt," it is likely that these men will adopt a definite policy of putting on the brakes at every possible point to prevent things they dislike from happening.⁸ Their purposes are being clearly stated in post-election editorials:

⁸ The temper of these leaders in Middletown and the role they desire to play in the modest sphere of their influence are somewhat akin to those of Stanley Baldwin as the leader of the National Government in England, as described by John Strachey:

"One of his supporters once said that Mr. Baldwin's achievements were always

The best bulwark of defense for American institutions continues to be the courts, especially the Supreme Court of the United States.

If the President seeks to attain such N.R.A. objectives as limitations on working hours, wage boosts, and improved working conditions there would be conflict.

If President Roosevelt moves to the right or if big business the country over contrives a working alliance with him, Middletown's business leaders will "go along." Should the present tension continue unabated, the mood of men of power and ability such as these may conceivably lead to explosive action. Middletown does not ordinarily do things suddenly. Its mood is cautious. It does not tend to initiate change. But it will line up overnight behind a widely diverging *fait accompli* if the latter suits its deep emotional need for security.

At the moment, Middletown looks equally askance at both fascism and communism. Both are foreign, authoritarian, and intensely distasteful. "All that stands between communism and fascism and what the United States has," declared a speaker before Rotary, "is a little paper ballot. The ballot is the only heritage left us by the men who fought in the Revolutionary War. Whenever one of the fundamental liberties is taken away it leaves an open road to the forces of communism and fascism." "Fascism is as violent and dictatorial as Bolshevism," said an editorial in March, 1932. "It means revolution just as surely as Bolshevism does; it is just as false to the common man's rights." In bracing its feet against "centralized government," "bureaucracy," and the "great danger that by over-generosity [government relief] we shall impoverish the thoughts and lives of thousands who would otherwise have been independent of mind," Middletown is simply voicing its conviction that, as expressed in a local editorial, "When bureaucracy and bloc control destroy representative govern-

negative; that he had spent his political life almost exclusively in *stopping* things from being done. It is true; for Mr. Baldwin knows that the limits of profitable action in Britain are becoming narrower and narrower. The strength of the British Empire is still enormous, but it is almost wholly defensive strength. He realizes instinctively that almost anything that anybody *does* will only make matters worse. He is the perfect statesman for an empire in decline; he is forever stopping things. He, in effect, attempts to stop the decline, and if he does not wholly deceive himself into believing that he can do that, he can at any rate, he knows, prevent it being immeasurably accelerated by the foolish actions of others." John Strachey, *The Coming Struggle for Power*. Chapter XV, "An Empire on the Defensive: The Role of Mr. Baldwin." (New York; Covici, Friede, 1933.)

ment, fascism may be just around the corner, or something even worse. When the individual arrives at the point where the government must become his guardian we have bureaucracy in full bloom. Then, with the failure of bureaucracy, despotism invariably follows."

During the 1936 campaign the local press reprinted Roger Babson's predictions that:

The chances are 50-50 that the United States will go Fascist when the next depression comes.

There is the possibility that the coming national election may be the last one for many years.

An editorial late in November, 1936, headed "Fascist Movement in the U. S.," after reviewing the evidence presented by "a writer of considerable prominence and of thorough reliability" that "a Fascist movement of importance is now under way in the United States," concluded:

The picture as painted seems almost fantastic, but it is possible that while all the furore has been going on about communism, another equally subversive force has been at work to undermine American institutions. But if the people are informed in time about what is going on they should have no difficulty in suppressing this movement as well as that of the communists.

There is no place in America either for communists or fascists. One is as bad as the other. Both are not only un-American, but anti-American.

But, averse as Middletown is to any sort of dictatorial control, what its business leaders want even more than political democracy is what they regard as conditions essential to their resumption of money-making. And those who do the more conspicuous money-making are probably prepared to yield a good many other things to the kind of regime that will flash for them the green "Go" light. These men recognize the power of the strong man, the man with power, and being successful in business is one long apprenticeship at adjusting to stronger men than oneself. They do not fear such a man, providing he is on their side.

If Middletown's press lumps fascism with communism as "undesirable and un-American," it also carries a significant trickle of editorial comment that leans, perhaps unconsciously, toward the "strong man" of "the right sort."

Why shouldn't the average man who has little personality of his own use discretion and attach himself to men who are now what he would like to

be? [asked an editorial in 1932.] If this strong man is a conservative with a well-lined nest and conviction that all who advocate change or disturbing of dividends should be jailed or deported, those who follow him are a little off the middle of the road too, but they're not as bad as the radicals.

A year before, when, in the midst of Chicago's municipal confusion, a Chicago businessman suggested that the businessmen of that city take over the running of the city, a Middletown editorial, under the caption "Business Steps into Politics," asserted:

When misrule continues too long, business will assume the dictatorship. And it, at least, will give us efficiency and economy.

An editorial in 1932 proclaimed:

WANTED—A RULING CLASS THAT WILL RULE

We are disgusted because the ruling class doesn't rule. . . . [The class that will rule] need not be the rapidly diminishing wealthy class, of course. It may be any class that possesses vision, sanity, and a sincere wish for the public welfare.

In conversations with businessmen in 1935, one gained a strong sense of their desire for "a leader"—one of their own sort. They cannot move without a leader, because "things are too big," but they know how to follow. One such man remarked in conversation: "Individualism has made a sorry mess of things. The government in its try in the New Deal has made a mess of things. So, what? Hitler and Mussolini may be wrong, but *we've* been wrong, too, so far. What we need is a capable leader." Increasingly, these men see a choice between "radicalism" and a something-that-will-put-down-radicalism. They think of the latter as an "American," a "patriotic" movement, and of the struggle between the two forces as a struggle to "save democracy." "Communism Is Spreading Here" was the headline late in 1936 over an address by the national director of Americanism for the American Legion, sponsored by the public affairs committee of the Y.M.C.A. "We cannot close our eyes," said an editorial, "upon the fact that communism, especially, has been making some inroads in America, with the backing of Moscow. As a natural offset to this we may see fascist demonstrations before long." And while the editorial reflects the mood of Middletown in urging that both movements should be uprooted "as noxious weeds," such an editorial as the following, probably concurred in wholeheartedly by every member of Rotary and the other men's civic

clubs, leaves little doubt as to which of the two movements is more "noxious," and as to which direction Middletown's official thought will take if events warrant:

LEGION OF PEACE AND PATRIOTISM

There are few finer expressions of patriotism than are to be found in the preamble to the [American] Legion's constitution:

"For God and Country, we associated ourselves together for the following purposes: . . . TO COMBAT THE AUTOCRACY OF BOTH THE CLASSES AND THE MASSES . . ."

In these days when the nations of the old world are torn by the strife of communism on the one hand and fascism with its dictatorship on the other, with democracy there fighting for its very existence; in these days when we know that in this country, too, radicalism has added greatly to its strength, and subversive forces are actively at work to undermine and destroy our own government, it is good to know that there is such an organization as the American Legion standing foursquare for the preservation of those democratic principles that are America.

These veterans offered their lives for the maintenance of the basic laws that hundreds of thousands in this country are seeking by subtle ways, and often openly, to overthrow. But so long as the American Legion and kindred organizations declare it to be their purpose "to uphold and defend the Constitution," and "to foster and perpetuate a one-hundred-per-cent Americanism," as they promise, the people of this nation will know that, whatever may happen, they have a staunch force and strong of heart manning the outer breastworks, and that there will be no surrender of our sacred institutions of government without a struggle.

The American Legion and the other patriotic organizations have enlisted for a fight that may come sooner than they now realize.

At this moment we have the spectacle of one of the country's important newspapers [the *Seattle Post-Intelligencer*] being prevented from publication by a mob led by a handful of communists, in spite of the fact that the workers on this paper have no grievance and are anxious to continue in their jobs.

Only the other day communists, with banners proclaiming their allegiance to a party that would overthrow our government by force, were successful in closing by mob action a factory not far from [Middletown], in spite of the fact that 450 of the 500 workers there wished to continue in their jobs and declared their relations with their employers were satisfactory.

So the communist terror in this country is a real thing—not a ghost in a bush, and such organizations as the American Legion have their work

cut out for them to destroy Red Russianism in America before it has the chance to destroy the rest of us.

In the American's Creed adopted by the Legion, it is declared to be the duty of a patriot to defend his country "AGAINST ALL ENEMIES," which means the enemies from within, just now, rather more than the enemies from without, for the former are more immediately menacing. . . .

The returning tide of business in 1935-36 has only served to heighten Middletown's impatience with the things beyond its control that hamper its return to buoyant prosperity. It is, under the surface, worried, sore, and frustrated. The frankest statement of civic pessimism and emotional bankruptcy the writers have ever read in the public press of Middletown (other than in the habitually caustic Democratic weekly) appeared in the personal column of the editor of the afternoon paper in January, 1936. Here one actually reads the sort of thing one heard in close privacy in 1935. It represents in part a somewhat whimsical editorial frankness, but also a stark candor rare in public admissions by business-class Middletown and capable of becoming highly explosive if it spreads. It happens to deal more immediately with local issues, but the mood that generates it easily leaps geographical boundaries. After reciting certain hoped-for local civic improvements, the editor said:

YOU JUST ARE NOT GOING TO GET ANY OF THE THINGS NOW THAT YOU HAVE BEEN PROMISED. Don't kid yourself about this. It just isn't in the cards. You'll have the river stinking as noisomely next summer as ever before; you'll be driving in and out of town over the same roads you always have driven; you will see the men working along the river banks and bed without accomplishing much of any importance—and all the rest of it. So don't deceive yourself.

Naturally comes the question of readers of this column, if any, Why? The story is too long and too complicated to tell, but the reasons have their roots in selfishness, inefficiency, ignorance, lack of concentration, politics, and THE LACK OF ONE SINGLE ORGANIZATION WHOLEHEARTEDLY DEVOTED TO THE INTERESTS OF THE PEOPLE WHO LIVE IN THIS COMMUNITY. One capable person at the head of [Middletown's] affairs could straighten out all the tangles in a week. We have a lot of civic organizations in [Middletown] like the Kiwanis Club, the Exchange Club, the Rotary Club, the Dynamo Club, and others, which gather for the purpose of eating once a week and which pride themselves on performing certain small services, whereas if they were to unite and have some real program, they could bring

about most of the things that are of vital interest to [Middletown.] But what do they do? Living in a city that is far less civilized than many in China where, at least, they have a program to take the sewage out of canals and streams, our civic clubs applaud themselves because they have sponsored something like a farm program, or they have folks tell them funny stories, and always they applaud any movement for the public welfare, applause being easy and inexpensive, and then go back to their jobs. . . .

I am getting very tired of all this hypocrisy of those who say they are trying to do things for [Middletown]. . . . I'd say they are trying not to do things for [Middletown] but to do [Middletown]. . . .

[MIDDLETOWN] IS LACKING IN INTELLIGENT LEADERSHIP. |

If I have put this thought over I have done a little something, but it won't amount to anything in action. I know that. It's all so terribly hopeless, this situation of the mass mind. . . .

Here speaks the voice of a culture seeing itself, despite its surface optimism, as conceivably in a *cul de sac*. It is not inconceivable that such a society of individuals who feel themselves floundering might go over like a row of cards and vent its pent-up anxiety in a mighty whoop of affirmation, if the right individual came along and gave it the right assurance in symbolic patriotic phrases. The working class, unorganized and devoid of symbols of its own, in 1924 served as a keyboard on which Klan organizers played *fortissimo* on the keys of patriotism and religion. In 1932 an ex-Klan leader started an abortive brown-shirt movement, with meetings replete with the fascist salute and other trimmings. If, when, and as the right strong man emerges—if he can emerge in a country as geographically diffuse as the United States—one wonders if Middletown's response from both business class and working class will not be positive and favorable. For unless there is a sharp rise in working-class solidarity in the interim, this Middletown working class, nurtured on business-class symbols, and despite its rebellious Roosevelt vote in 1936, may be expected to follow patiently and even optimistically any bright flag a middle-class strong man waves.

It seems not impossible that, unless this sense shared by business class and working class alike of being a wanderer in a world too big for one is lulled by returning prosperity, or unless the working class develops more cohesion of its own, the way may be paved for an acceptance of a type of control that will manhandle life deliberately and

coercively at certain points to the end of rescuing a semblance of control over these all-important economic institutions. At the moment, Middletown businessmen are bitterly opposed to "bureaucracy" and to "centralized control," but it is at least possible that this opposition in the name of traditional *laissez-faire* freedom would recede in the face of a seizure of power carefully engineered as *by* the business class and *for* the business class and publicized in the name of Americanism and prosperity.

While such contingencies are possible, more likely is continued adherence of sorts to Middletown's customary middle-of-the-road course. If labor organization and other forms of "radicalism" become sufficiently insistent, compromises will be made, the "middle of the road" will be relocated somewhat to the left; the new path will in time become familiar and the "American way." Compromise and expediency rule Middletown's course. At point after point—in its handling of relief, in city government, in its dealings with dissent—it deals with present situations simply as it must, using the old words. Marked shifts in national policy would change this. Strong impact from more explosive centers would change it. But, in the absence of such inescapable pressures, Middletown itself is likely to continue its course of reluctant adaptation and expediency into the future.

In viewing this sober, hopeful, well-meaning city, caught in its institutional conflicts, caught between past and future, and not knowing which way to move, one recalls now and again Tawney's characterization of the ruling class in Europe after the French Revolution: "... they walked reluctantly backwards into the future, lest a worse thing should befall them."⁹

⁹ R. H. Tawney, *Equality* (London; Allen and Unwin, 1931), p. 127.

*"The people learn, unlearn, learn,
a builder, a wrecker, a builder again, . . ."*

"Precisely who and what is the people?"

*"Hope is a tattered flag and a dream out of time.
.
Hope is an echo, hope ties itself yonder, yonder."*

*"In the darkness with a great bundle of grief
the people march.
In the night, and overhead a shovel of stars for
keeps, the people march:
'Where to? what next?'"*

Carl Sandburg, *The People, Yes*. (New York; Harcourt, Brace, 1936.)