

Liberty: Neglect and Abuse

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Mordecai Roshwald is Professor Emeritus of Humanities and the Social Sciences at the University of Minnesota. His essay entitled "Quo Vadis, America?" marked his first appearance in *Modern Age* (Spring 1958). In the following essay he explores various aspects of liberty affecting American life and thought. What he sees in the contemporary situation is the dominance of "trend-setters," who employ whatever means bring success, and who wantonly manipulate public opinion to their advantage. The public now falls prey to "a host of salesmen of ideas, of advertisers of policies, of marketers of salvation, who have a firm grip on the minds and mental habits of the American people." Critical judgment and discriminating thought surrender to cleverly packaged advertising tricks, deceptions, half-truths, falsehoods. Roshwald believes, however, that a reordering of educational goals, which he specifies, can stem the tide of deterioration. People thus educated, he contends, "will confront the liberty of deception, parading as liberty of speech, with the liberty to think and reach independent judgment." This is an essay worth pondering.

WHEN I PUBLISHED my first essay in *Modern Age* in 1958, I was a newcomer to the United States, having arrived at the Atlantic shore shortly before Thanksgiving of 1955. My article was based on observations and impressions after a couple of years of teaching at a large state university in the Midwest, but they were in no way restricted to the academic experience. On the contrary, I tried to read in the book of life and understand what I perceived. My vision had been formed in older civilizations, and I looked at the new social and cultural experience with the eyes of a foreigner—detached, independent, critical.

Perhaps some people, including my colleagues and an occasional student, would have added "biased."

The title of my essay was "Quo Vadis, America?" It was an apt title for a questioning newcomer, who, somewhat daringly, suggested that America should pose the question to itself, as well. For, in a way, America was a newcomer too—a newcomer to a world of much older civilizations, whether in Europe or other parts of the world. Being a newcomer has its shortcomings: lack of experience, lack of maturity, lack of sophistication. I may have been guilty of some of these as an observer and critic of American life.

But these characteristics may have been shared by the American civilization, a novice by Old Country standards, and thus simplistic, naïve, and, in some ways, innocent.

My essay took off from the observation of David Riesman, the sociologist, that American society was becoming "other-directed," that is to say, that people did not judge issues by their own, inner, standards and convictions, but by what other people thought or did. Thus, instead of subjecting their lives and their conduct to a moral judgment, they were adjusting them to current vogues. Such vogues change with considerable frequency, and so does the conduct of the people following them. While following vogue in dress or hair-style is fairly innocuous, when vogue sets the standard in morals, aesthetics, cultural affairs, society becomes spineless and erratic.

The malaise ensuing from such a trend is further compounded by the personality of the vogue-setters, if they are not conscientious individuals, but self-seeking persons with their own success primarily, or exclusively, in mind. They could be, as I suggested in my essay, the incarnations of Machiavelli's Prince, or the disciples of the Greek sophists—with devastating consequences for society.

The issue which I propose to examine now, thirty-nine years later, is whether this trend has continued and developed, or subsided and disappeared. Has America rolled down this peculiar path of degeneration, or has it overcome the menace and asserted its own way, based on conviction, or a set of principles, on firmly held beliefs? Do Americans justify and assert their beliefs, or do they passively accept the dictates of self-appointed "leaders," or of anonymous trends? For if the latter is the case, this is tantamount to surrendering individuality and the liberty of thinking and judging.

Indeed, such a condition not only facilitates the succumbing to the pressures of vogue, but it also makes for the unquestioning acceptance of common truths, including those enshrined in the United States Constitution. What is wrong with that? The problem with such an attitude is that it undermines the truth. For, as John Stuart Mill taught us, it is only by a continuous examination of truth, or what is accepted as true, that truth remains alive. As to the Constitution, it is too important to be left to the interpretations of lawyers only. The citizens need to comment on it, as well.

Thus, our examination will lead also to the exploration of liberty, or some of its aspects, as they impinge on the current American way-of-life. The freedom and practice of individual reflection and thinking is a basic condition of the viability and the progress of American civilization. It is important to determine how it has fared.

The question how America progressed or degenerated over the last forty years is not easy to answer. Do Americans persist in being other-directed, or do they exercise their freedom to think and to judge? How has America fared at the hands of its citizens?

In some ways America has displayed maturity, good sense, and moral progress over the past four decades. The residues of racial discrimination have been largely abolished by deliberate legislative and political effort. Women have come to assume greater social responsibilities and attained fuller public participation outside the family unit. These changes, though affected by political pressure, owe much to the moral awareness of the people, as well. Evidently, there were significant public sectors which did not surrender to self-seeking Machiavellians and who retained their own judgment. There has been an enormous advancement in science and technology—the consequence of alert minds and sound

education in these fields, at least at the university level. There is new awareness of health needs, and new habits of eating and exercise improve public health—certainly a product of right thinking.

Yet the counting involves not only blessings. Crime, violent crime, has increased. Drug addiction has become a private calamity and a public menace. Having children out of wedlock has deprived them of the family setting, which is the most suitable environment for nurture and education. The consequences of rising crime have proved catastrophic. People are denied the basic sense of security in their neighborhoods and in the city. Imitation and other-directedness have played a significant role in this process of degeneration.

Taking the advantages and the shortcomings into account, balancing the pluses and the minuses, is America in a better or a worse shape today than it was forty years earlier? The question, put in such a comprehensive way, can hardly be answered, for how can one quantify crime versus health, equality versus drug addiction? In individual cases, where people are personally affected, for good or for ill, they can offer an answer, but it will be a personal statement. Nor is it that important to pass a general verdict, for it is clear that we ought to build on the achievements and combat the degeneration, irrespective of their relative weight.

Let us, however, look at the American scene from the perspective of other-directedness and the independence and freedom of individual judgment, and see how they have fared.

When I started teaching at an American university, I would face a class of thirty students, and from my elevated podium looked down on trim crew-cuts, or flat-tops (there was a subtle distinction between the two, which eluded me), intermingled with medium cut hair of coeds, often embellished with perma-

nent wave. Some years later, the panorama changed. The boys—or was it men now?—let their hair grow long, and the crew-cuts all but vanished. Was it a conservative return to seventeenth century hair style? The men thought not: it was an expression of reversal, of opposition to the established ways. The girls—or was it women now?—also let their hair grow long, and gave up the permanent wave.

Initially, as the change was taking place, it may have expressed and it symbolized independent thinking, always to be welcomed in an academic setting. Yet, before long, it became a new vogue, and students conformed to it with eagerness and alacrity—irrespective of their ideas and reflections on society and culture, if they had any. The vogue caught up with high school and elementary school, as well. In short, even if the direction changed, other-directedness remained. Indeed, it ruled supreme.

As I was retiring from teaching, the scene started to change again, and this time it took a bizarre turn. Men—or was it males now?—took to piercing one of their ears, and adorning it with an earring. Was it the impact of the pirate image, conveyed through some old motion picture? Was it the example of some tribe living in the jungles of South America or Africa? The trend-setter remained in the dark, but the trend spread far and wide and encompassed children and adults. As to women—or was it females now?—some of them started piercing their nostrils and adorned them with glistening ornaments. The Indian example may have been the culprit here. Fortunately, the old-new style, while widespread, has not become pervasive, as the older vogues were. Apparently, some common-sense resistance prevented a total victory of the new vogue in this instance.

Yet, looked at from our perspective, it seems that other-directedness has been

a fairly constant characteristic in American civilization. *Plus ça change, plus c'est la même chose*. And the trend-setters are not people of reflection, people of social responsibility, people of cultural creativity, but largely anonymous and faceless individuals.

These examples may seem fairly innocuous in themselves, were it not that they are meant to exemplify and symbolize the great impact on American civilization of other-directedness, or of lack of individually-guided behavior, in various spheres of conduct. The trend to imitate in various domains, as further elaborated, persists, and perhaps has become more powerful. Consequently, the American way-of-life has been greatly affected—perhaps, in some cases, dominated—by forces, anonymous or identifiable, which steer the civilization in arbitrary and often senseless directions, with the passive acquiescence of a thoughtless other-directed crowd. The ship follows an erratic course, the travellers happily trusting the ignorant navigator.

Who are these navigators? Perhaps the best way to identify these trend-setters is to call them “advertisers.” We do not restrict this term to those who try to convince the public to buy various commodities, but it is these advertisers who set an example for a wider class of people who try to sell to the public ideas, politicians, salvation. It is in the nature of advertisers not to confine themselves to rational arguments and to sensible judgment. They *may* use arguments, if and to the extent that these promote their objectives, but they also rely heavily on allurements, seduction, and a host of psychological tricks, to make the public accept their supply and advice. The attainment of objective is their primary consideration, while the means—whether brain-stimulating or brain-washing—are of secondary importance, indeed insignificant altogether. Their

motto is: Sell the car, good or bad! Sell the jokes, decent or not! Sell the show, soothing or violent! Sell the politicians, honest or crooked! Sell the policy, wise or stupid! Sell salvation, real or imaginary! Sell ideas, true or false!

Thus we face a flood of advertising of countless commodities, blinking at us from the television screen, the foremost medium of the contemporary culture, again and again. In the words of Aldous Huxley in *Brave New World*, so many thousand repetitions make one truth. In time of elections, the candidates for office are equipped with sound-bites, deemed to appeal to the voters by public opinion experts. They continue in this vein in public meetings. Political philosophy is essentially thrown to the wind, as Democrats turn Republican, and Republicans become Democrats—all in accordance with the chance of getting the support of the majority of voters. Various churches, especially of the sectarian kind, try to advertise salvation, on and off television and radio, to their followers, actual and potential, not by delving into the religious doctrine, but by creating an air of excitement, hysteria, and histrionics—their kind of advertising. Even universities are not immune to the offensive of unreason. Here, too, vogues have occasionally been established, deviating from the mainstream of detached rational inquiry. Just as once Marxism and psychoanalysis invaded the realms of humanistic studies, deconstruction has become a new fashion with many ardent followers. “Political correctness” in social studies and in general, while originating with a justified concern for the underprivileged and discriminated, has grown out of proportion and become a fetish. At least some opponents to such trends have asserted themselves in the academic world.

The picture in the world of entertainment displays the influence of other-directedness and the consequent decline

of civilization even more. For one thing, television with its ever-expanding range due to technological development has become the dominant public entertainment, at the expense of books and radio. The quality of the programs has deteriorated steadily, as violence and sex have become increasingly popular and increasingly explicit. This, in turn, has affected the printed word, as novels try to compete with the screen by resorting to the same elements of sickly titillation. Opera turned into soap-opera, with bubbles reigning supreme. Jazz turned into rock, which has been superseded by rap. The rock singers became enshrined in Olympus, as their successors inherit the world.

All this is possible because people, ordinary people, suspend their judgment and become vulnerable to the influence of mind-manipulators. Indeed, this is a paradoxical situation in a country which prides itself on freedom and boasts of fierce individualism. Where is the individual self-assertion of reflection, of conviction, of principle? How have individuals become a herd of sheep, following the unscrupulous shepherds?

The explanation is that Americans, while retaining their liberty, have suspended their judgment. Each American is free to speak his mind or express her opinion, and to follow his or her conviction. But these freedoms do not assure that every individual must have a conviction, or an active mind. Television has done its share to lull the minds to passive compliance, and has intensified the erosion of personal judgment and conviction. The remote-control which enables the viewer to switch from one channel to other, mostly similar, channels has not awakened the viewer's mind, nor stimulated his or her taste. People have succumbed, in the words of Aldous Huxley (in the 1946 introduction to *Brave New World*) to "the freedom to daydream under the influence of dope and movies

and the radio." While for Huxley this was an impending threat, for us, fifty years later, it is a widespread reality. Of course, such a "freedom" is the very opposite of freedom.

Yet, if in one sense the individual has not exercised the freedom assured him by the Constitution and by the American tradition, the freedom of individual thinking, in another sense he has not only used his liberty but also abused it. Take the freedom of speech, the sacrosanct First Amendment. On the strength of it, no restriction is imposed on acts of racial hatred, and, in the name of this principle, pornography claims its right to invade the domain of families, whether through television or Internet. The burning of a cross on the lawn of an African-American, an intended insult and intimidation, is protected as a case of freedom of speech. The march of American Nazis through a town inhabited by many Holocaust refugees is defended as another case of free expression by the First Amendment fetishists.

The substantive, besides the legal, argument in favor of this permissiveness is that, once certain manifestations of opinion are prohibited, the Pandora's box of state control over public opinion and its expression will be opened and America may decline into a totalitarian state. The argument is fundamentally specious. One might as well argue that once a person excludes certain harmful food from his diet, he faces the danger of further exclusions and, finally, starvation. It is entirely feasible to prohibit the expression of hatred to an ethnic or to a religious group because of its distinction, while retaining freedom of speech. This was done in Britain and some people were sentenced because of hatred propaganda, and yet the country continues to enjoy freedom of speech. Indeed, some American hate-mongers have been barred from Britain and Germany, because of such legal restrictions.

Another liberty, again enshrined in the Constitution's Second Amendment, assures "the right of the people to keep and bear arms." Whatever the importance of such a provision in the late eighteenth century, when it was linked "to a well-regulated militia," it cannot remain unaffected by the new circumstances of our times, when the safety of the nation is entrusted to a regular army. In any case, to claim this Amendment as a justification for ownership of high-powered semi-automatic weapons—they were not available two centuries ago—is absurd. The issue of arms ownership in the United States must not be decided by the principle of liberty, constitutional or cultural, but by the merit of the case, i.e., whether it increases or decreases the safety of the people. It is such considerations, weighed with objective detachment, that should also determine who may bear what kind of arms and when.

Then there are some people, individuals and groups, who, steeped in the notion of liberty and the perception of America as the land of the free, unrestricted by authority and government, take the liberty to arm themselves, and to oppose lawful government and the sensible conventions of civil society and take law and arms into their hands, even to the point of fighting the established government. Such people may be "savers" of humanity like the Unabomber, religious visionaries or maniacs like David Koresh and his followers, or the Oklahoma terrorists. They all fall into the category of perverted champions of or adherents to liberty—actually the abusers of freedom.

What is the source of the problem of the failures of liberty in the United States? Why does not liberty, American liberty, live up to its promise, immaculate and untarnished? The fundamental reason, as we see it, is that liberty must be weighed and controlled by reason and judgment. This is equally true of the

neglect of liberty and its abuse.

Let us take the way in which public opinion is manipulated by advertisers (in our extended sense of the word), and how it is shaped in matters of consumption, politics, religion, ideas. The flaw here largely lies with the public, who respond to freely propagated or beamed messages, without employing their critical judgment. The value of freedom of speech, as John Stuart Mill reminded us, is in stimulating reflection and discussion, thereby leading to the approximation to truth. If, however, speech is a one-sided oration poured into uncritical minds, it loses its inherent value. Without *thinking* people, free speech becomes useless. Mindless people cannot benefit from it.

The blame for this state of things is, of course, shared by the manipulators of public opinion, who ignore the minds of the public and focus on the tricks of the trade to *influence* people, not to *convince* them. They, too, denigrate the thinking capacity of *Homo sapiens*. Indeed, they denigrate their own intellectual and moral sovereignty as well, in that they ignore what is true and right, and concentrate on what they want to sell—true or false, right or wrong—to the public.

The whole tenor of what passes as public debate becomes colored by the art of persuasion. Genuine encounter of conflicting opinions, which would promote and encourage individual reflection, is replaced by a circus of clever advertisers. And, of course, the medium of television is particularly suited for this kind of phoney freedom. Yet, essentially, the issue predated our own advanced age by almost two and one half millennia. For it was stated with clarity by Plato in the *Apology*, when Socrates addressed his judges, the people of Athens, and made the distinction between the force of eloquence and the force of truth, that is to say, between the art of

persuasion of the sophists and the search of truth of the philosopher. We need to revive this distinction today.

Then, the absence of mature reflection and judgment, which characterizes the free flow of "advertising," is also apparent in the simplistic perception of liberties by those who blatantly abuse them. Had they been endowed with the capacity of independent thinking and critical judgment they would have realized that some of the constitutional freedoms must be tempered by common sense. They would recognize the harm and danger of hatred, publicly demonstrated, and of display of violence on the television screen, and curb the freedom of expression in these regards. They would curb the puerile penchant for the freedom to play with powerful weapons, for the sake of the liberty to retain life and limb. They would understand that liberty is not anarchy, and the concern about the abuse of power by the government, while often justified, must not be countered by resorting to arms and violence, but has to be channelled into legally allowed ways, which fortunately the Constitution allows and provides. In the last resort, freedom and government are not opposites, but complement each other. In the words of John Locke: "the end of law is not to abolish or restrain, but to preserve and enlarge freedom... where there is no law there is no freedom.... Liberty...is not...a liberty for every man to do what he lists" (*Essay of Civil Government*, 1690, VI, 57).

Is American civilization doomed to persist in its ways, and, if anything, only further deteriorate into a passive acceptance of the views and ideas of the assorted advertisers, while blindly venerating the accepted liberties without realizing their occasional transgression against human interests and basic decency? Is there no way to shatter the fanatical belief in liberty unlimited, which some fringe elements appropriate in the

name of the American way-of-life?

It is true that civilizational changes are slow to take place, and if they do, it is mostly due to circumstances of historical development rather than as a result of a deliberate choice on the part of the people, or an influential segment of a nation. Yet this is not an absolute verdict. In a way, the United States may be open to a deliberate reform and change more than some of the more traditionally-minded civilizations.

Traditions may be the accumulation of past experience and wisdom, and in this sense have an advantage over a civilization with a short history and one which is less inclined to venerate the past, as is typical of the American way-of-life. Yet traditional societies may also adhere to questionable perceptions and usages—such as bull-fighting in Spain and fox-hunting in Britain. Some traditional civilizations persist in Draconian punishment and iniquitous treatment of women. Others, to be sure, combine tradition with rational ways of thinking and capacity of judgment, and tolerate the active participation of people in the shaping of the civilization.

Thus if it is difficult to generalize about the feasibility of a conscious and deliberate improvement in the ways of a civilization of long standing and cherishing its distinctive traditions, it seems clear that such a change should be relatively easy in a society with fewer traditions and not traditionally minded. America may have been deprived of some of the benefits of tradition, but it has the advantage of being always ready—occasionally even eager—to change its ways. Americans believe in the capacity of man to mould his destiny and in his capability to improve his lot and the ways of the society of which he is a member. It is, in the American perception, only a matter of will. Such optimism, even if not always justified, should make it easier to change what is deemed

undesirable. An appeal to America to reverse the shortcomings, as outlined here, need not be futile.

To be sure, it is not an easy endeavor. For there is a host of salesmen of ideas, of advertisers of policies, of marketers of salvation, who have a firm grip on the minds and mental habits of the American people. The established perception of liberty, if not cast in concrete, is deeply entrenched, as well. What can be done to attempt to reform the prevalent modes of public opinion, or lack of opinion? What steps could save liberty of opinion from neglect, and the notion of liberty from being abused?

The primary way of an attempt to change the situation is to develop and strengthen the individual's critical judgment. The capacity of men and women to discriminate between truth and falsehood, between right and wrong, between beautiful and ugly, has been numbed by the flood of advertising, deception, half-truths, pressure of prevalent opinion. There is little chance of restricting these forces, but there is a way of developing resistance to their impact.

One should be able to call a falsehood a falsehood, even if it is repeated on the radio countless times. One should be able to detect deception, even if it is alluringly coated. One should be able to judge the quality of an automobile not by the charms of the woman used by advertisers to promote the vehicle. One should be able to evaluate a drink by ignoring that it is allegedly popular with the present generation. One should be able to evaluate the message, if any, of a political party not by the hoopla of a convention. One should be able to make, or reject, a religious commitment, ignoring the histrionic performance of preachers and of mass-hysteria. The word of the Lord has to be sought in "a still small voice" (1 Kings 19:12).

This kind of independence of mind cannot be instilled by a speech or a

sermon. It has to be *cultivated*—preferably from childhood. Indeed, it seems to me that this has been neglected by the current system of education. This is largely due to the separation of form from content, of technique from substance. We teach children reading skills and separate them from the material they read, or could read. We teach, on higher levels, English communication and do not link it to literature. We teach, with mixed success, spelling and grammar, but neglect the discussion of thought and ideas. We teach how to cull material from newspapers and other sources for writing a paper—in high school or in college—but we hardly encourage independent evaluation of the reliability of the material and the veracity of the sources. We present to college students diversity of opinions on a certain topic, but do not expect them or encourage them to form their own opinion and justify it in objective terms.

The older method, still retained in some countries, exposes children in the early grades to stories which stimulate the discrimination between right and wrong, noble and ignoble. As a child matures, he or she can be exposed to more complex material, or to a reinterpretation of deceptively simple texts. One need not adduce examples of authors and works which could be used. There is no dearth of literary works in English and in translation which stir the soul and stimulate the mind. Novels, short stories, dramas, poetry chosen from the classics of literature—read over the years—would confront the student with ideas, with moral issues, with aesthetic achievements, and help in the development of the student's own intellectual, moral and aesthetic sensibility. By reading and studying good literature, students acquire the skill of expressing themselves in good English. By communicating with the masters of ideas and style in the past, they acquire the capa-

bility of communicating with each other.

The verbal side of education is not the only one that requires a reform. The aesthetic judgment in other fields, notably music, must not be forgotten. Whether this is done in school or at home, it is of paramount importance to expose children and young persons to the musical achievements of the last three or four centuries. Fortunately, this can be achieved in our times at a negligible cost. One does not have to go to a concert to listen to a performance of a Mozart concerto or a Beethoven symphony. One does not have to travel to a major city to attend an opera of Verdi or Puccini. The best virtuosi and singers can perform for us through their recordings. For once, technology can be put at the service of education and cultural development. For only by being exposed to good music over a number of years will the young person be able to enjoy and appreciate it. Once such an appreciation is widespread, the public standard of musical entertainment will be raised. The people will discover and gain the freedom of musical enjoyment.

An additional step, perhaps restricted to a select group at this stage, would be to expose students to another language and civilization. What I have in mind is not only the attainment of proficiency to facilitate business contacts and travel. Another language should be linked to an insight into another culture and its distinctive sensibilities. Studying Italian should mean getting a taste of Dante. Studying German should involve reading Goethe and Schiller. Studying Spanish should lead to the appreciation of Cervantes. Such an acquaintance with another culture, far from diminishing one's own cultural awareness, deepens it and enhances a wider individual perspective and a more acute discrimination and judgment, both aesthetic and moral. Indeed, it broadens the freedom of the individual.

Moreover, the student—with graduated increase as he or she matures—should be encouraged to make articulate and cogent judgments about the diverse books read and issues studied in the humanistic subjects. It is of paramount importance that the understanding of material be complemented by a *critical* evaluation, that the knowledge of facts be amplified by the *judgment* of a situation or an event.

Taking such an active attitude cannot be adequately encouraged and achieved by the widespread system of the so-called “objective” tests. They are easy to evaluate, but they do not evaluate the student's creative intelligence. In fact, they encourage man's computer-like thinking process and thereby discourage independent thinking. Essay writing—whether in literature or history, social studies or philosophy—both in high school and college, ought to be a central component of the process of education. Self-expression in an individual style encourages the development of personality, the rock on which free society is built.

All this will not necessarily make young Americans infallible judges of things true or false, right and wrong, beautiful and ugly. Yet it will instil in them a capacity to discriminate and to think. They will not emerge from the long years of schooling merely equipped with skills (reading, writing, mathematics, and even operating a computer) and bestowed with useful information—important as these are for involvement and advancement in the economic field. They will listen and respond, look and discriminate, be open to the views of others, but also assert their own opinions and tastes.

People thus educated will more likely see through the gimmicks of advertisers and stand up to the clever manipulators of public opinion, or rather passive non-opinion. They will be able to recognize

the television dramas for their worth, when judged by the standards of Shakespeare and Ibsen. They will easily recognize the inconsistencies of politicians, guided by public opinion experts. They will hardly be enticeable by the antics of the sellers of instant salvation. They will be inured to conditioning, programming, brain-washing. They will confront the liberty of deception, parading as *liberty of speech*, with the *liberty to think*, and reach independent judgment.

Moreover, with the increasing numbers of mature thinking individuals, the understanding will grow of the need to control the various liberties with common sense and practical judgment. Educated people—educated in our sense—will not blindly clutch at a principle, or at an article of the Constitution, and regard

it as a holy relic, to be guarded by assorted lawyers of one organization or another, as a fetish is guarded by a shaman. They will comprehend the principle of freedom, in the context of the social situation, and, bearing in mind the wellbeing of society, interpret and apply it accordingly. They certainly will *not* be likely to provide recruits for groups and organizations which confuse liberty with anarchy.

In short, they will neither neglect the liberty to think, nor abuse liberty for anti-social activity. They will benefit from the liberty to explore, to learn, to discuss. Of course, their achievement will also benefit society at large. They will form an *avant-garde*, which may be followed by others, and eventually become the dominant force in American civilization.