

The Saturday Review

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American Culture for Export

THE conception held abroad in almost every country that the United States is undoubtedly a fabulously wealthy nation but that it lacks any of the cultural aspects of life is rapidly disappearing. That it has lasted so long has been our own fault, for until this year we have done little or nothing to put an end to it. Even a nation so enlightened as France has judged us by the motion pictures we have sent abroad, by translations of our novels, and by the more lurid aspects of American life revealed in our newspapers. Frenchmen may have admired Hollywood's lavish technique, but films have given the impression that our people live in gaudy mansions, behave like gangsters, drive around the country in enormous automobiles. Europeans may have recognized that our foremost writers deserved the acclaim they have received, but they knew the South only through William Faulkner's novels, the Middle West as it was interpreted by Sinclair Lewis and later neo-naturalists, and the Far West through John Steinbeck's "Grapes of Wrath."

Our first attempt to present a different aspect of American culture was launched in January by ANTA, The American National Theatre Academy, sponsored by our State Department, and hailed by President Eisenhower, who predicted that it would be of vast significance to the cause of friendship and understanding between the people of America and Western Europe. Most of the funds necessary for the project were raised from private sources. Known as "Salute to France," ANTA offered a two-month program—the theatre, the ballet, the Philadelphia Orchestra, and an exhibition of

fifty years of American art which drew an average daily attendance of 2,500 people.

"Salute to France" closed on July 7 after two successful months, headlined by Judith Anderson in her favorite role in "Medea," the Rogers and Hammerstein musical "Oklahoma," Thornton Wilder's "The Skin of Our Teeth," the New York City Ballet directed by George Balanchine, and three concerts of the Philadelphia Orchestra conducted by Eugene Ormandy. This large and expensive enterprise has indeed exceeded the hopes of its founders. It was a magnificent answer to anti-Americanism, which as Robert Sherwood said "has drenched the people of Europe with propaganda, first by the Nazis and then by the Communists, an answer which says in effect, 'the Americans have money, they have power, but they are uncultured barbarians'."

"SALUTE to France" was conceived in June of last year. A letter had come to the attention of ANTA through diplomatic channels stating that the Minister of Fine Arts of France had suggested to Ambassador C. Douglas Dillon that in the spring of 1955 America might stage a great festival of the arts in Paris. ANTA was at the same time informed that our Government had no funds available for so expensive a project, but was asked politely if it would assume the responsibility of raising the necessary funds and directing the entire festival. The French Government offered to provide the necessary theatres, fully staffed, and without charge.

To the average American it might appear that since the United States

Government has spent billions of dollars to revive the economy of many foreign nations, it might be induced to hallmark a few hundreds of thousands of dollars to continue a venture which has proved its value. Indeed, President Eisenhower in his State of the Union message to Congress last year proposed the establishment of a Federal Arts Commission to encourage artistic endeavors. "In the advancement of the various activities which will make our civilization endure and flourish," he said, "the Federal Government should do more to give official recognition to the importance of the arts and other cultural activities." It would seem to be reasonable that, if his idea is accepted by the Government, part of the necessary funds should be used to send examples of American art and culture to every country where it would be acceptable. But whether or not his suggestion is accepted, ANTA's foreign venture in Paris and elsewhere has led to worldwide cultural efforts. The Gershwin-Du Bose Heyward operetta, after a tour in Yugoslavia, Greece, and the Near East, opened in the Municipal Theatre in Rio De Janeiro on July 9 where it was received, according to *The New York Times*, with "thunderous applause." It was also the greatest social event of the season. Last May the Symphony of the Air ended a triumphant tour of the major cities of Japan. According to a press report a Japanese critic wrote that he did not believe there have been any musicians from abroad "who have so successfully grasped the heart-strings of the Japanese people." Thousands of people lined up at box-offices a day in advance, sleeping on the ground wrapped in quilts. The musicians were flown to Okinawa and Korea. This was only the beginning of the Symphony's Far Eastern tour, which was extended two weeks to play in Bangkok, Singapore, Colombo, Kuala Lumpur, Manila, and Hong Kong. The tour was sponsored by ANTA's Exchange Program.

A conception which has in so short a time proved that other nations, aside from Russia, are eager to know more of American culture, that they will welcome our actors, dancers, and musicians, will applaud them if they deserve it and treat them handsomely in the press, should be given every opportunity to expand and to prove once and for all time that we do not deserve the reputation of being a country without culture of any significance. The day may come when Russia and the United States will exchange their art, their drama, music, and ballet. The revelation of their different cultures may prove to be a better key to co-existence than armies and atomic weapons. —H. S.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

CENSORSHIP OF LIBRARIES

AS A LIBRARIAN I thank you for the article, "Censors and the Library" [SR July 2], is something that should be brought to the attention of the public. Of course, the information is familiar to librarians through their professional reading, but the general public is either unaware or indifferent to censorship or other conforming pressures on the libraries of America. The geographical spread of the censorship attempts should be interesting to your readers, as it indicates that the censorship bogey is not something which is limited to the "Wild West," the "Effete East," or the "Decadent South."

FRANK J. ANDERSON.

Salina, Kans.

THE HIGHER LOYALTY

EARL SCHENCK MIERS's interpretation of Grant, Lee, and Lincoln was compelling and deeply moving ("He Reduced War to Four Words" [SR July 9]). I speak as one reared in the South.

For me the tragedy of Lee arises from inability to choose the higher loyalty—a difficulty of even lesser minds in the conflict of principles today. Dramatic literature contains nothing more affecting than the life of this man, whose home site looked over on the very capital of his country, yet who chose to lead the army of a cause in which he did not believe—and to lead it to the bitter end. As Lincoln proved to be the single greatest resource of the Union, so Lee for dis-union. Consider the growth of Lincoln as he gained strength from the high choice, as against Lee's stoic descent into failure in supporting what he knew to be wrong. What needless ruin might have been spared had this noble person, Lee, made his choice the other way.

J. L. ZWINGLE.

Ithaca, N. Y.

A FABLE

I AM DISTRESSED that Earl Schenck Miers should have resurrected the old newspaper calumny, extensively exploited by P. T. Barnum, that Jefferson Davis was "caught . . . running away in one of his wife's dresses." Not only does no official report by anyone present at Davis's capture confirm this tale, but the only two of his captors who originally recognized him specifically denied it, and agreed with his own account. He was wearing a gray suit (now in the Confederate Museum in Richmond) and a waterproof "raglan" or "ulster," which did indeed belong to his wife, but which he donned by mistake because his own was identical with it except for the size. This garment and a "traveling shawl," common in the period, which he wore in lieu of a hat, were sent to the War Department, and were still there in the Taft Administration.



THROUGH HISTORY WITH J. WESLEY SMITH

"It seems he saved money for quite an elaborate tomb. However, the taxes were raised last year and . . ."

One of the men who took Davis prisoner, Captain James H. Parker, in denying this fabrication, told the Portland, Maine, *Argus*: "I am no admirer of Jefferson Davis. I am a Yankee, full of Yankee prejudices, but think it wicked to lie about him." I commend these sentiments to Miers. Davis was beyond question, "severe, cantankerous, argumentative," but he was uncompromisingly brave, as his war record in Mexico demonstrates, and he was not the man to run away "in one of his wife's dresses."

W. J. WILLIAMSON, III.

Ashland, Ky.

DAVY CROCKETT

JOHN HAVERSTICK's dissection of "The Two Davy Crocketts" [SR July 9], is perceptive and entertaining, but one might wish his research jaunt to the public library had been less hurried, his jotting down of Crockett lore less rapid. For one thing, he perpetuates a common confusion that has plagued us these two decades: It was the *Southwest Review*, not the *Southern Review*, which published the "erudite article by Walter Blair" in July 1940 that differentiated no fewer than six Davys. The estimable and lamented *Southern Review* was published at Louisiana State University between 1935 and 1942, whereas *Southwest Review* has been in continuous publication since 1915 and is preparing to celebrate its fortieth anniversary this fall.

One might wish that Mr. Haverstick had also run across two other Davy Crockett items that would have bolstered his sagging faith in the hero. Constance Rourke's "Davy Crockett: Forgotten

Facts and Legends," published in the *Southwest Review* as long ago as January 1934, points to the "careless wealth of Crockett's affiliations and the ease with which legends clustered about his name" but calls Crockett's "Narrative" a classic in our literature, "one of the first to use the American language with fulness and assurance." Much more recently Joseph Leach in "Crockett's Almanacs and the Typical Texan" (*Southwest Review*, Spring 1950) shows how present-day notions of Texans as bloodthirsty braggarts stem directly from the Crockett character.

ALLEN MAXWELL.

Dallas, Tex.

THE CASE FOR HOPE

I LIKED Arthur Compton's article "The Case for Hope" [SR June 18]. He has touched on many broad areas that thinking men and women are concerned with. What I earnestly wish for would be his sharing with us in more personal terms his experience in individual and group efforts, in cooperativeness, in education. Perhaps even simply as guideposts for those who think their lives too busy to be involved. Perhaps such clarification would help others because we do not always know or understand people's motivations. I also wish Compton had used another figure for his sending—"And so we shall build the wall, for the men will have a mind to work." It seems to negate the case for hope. A wall shuts in and shuts out, and provides the basis for further misunderstanding.

JOSEPHINE B. WEIL.

New York, N.Y.