

INTRODUCTION.

This is a case study in political conflict. It is a story that deals with some of the institutional cleavages to which post war American society has been subjected. The setting is Middletown; the hero, a political "reformer". The plot deals with the rise and fall of the Ku Klux Klan in Middletown. The nexus between plot and setting is a phase in the career of the hero. "To some Americans this man, George R. Dale, was the best-known citizen of Middletown. When he died at the age of sixty-seven in March, 1936, the Associated Press obituary commanded space of half a column or more in the press of New York, Chicago, and other cities. Dale was a 'white-haired little man with the seat worn out of his pants' who for twenty years had edited a local Democratic weekly. Always fearless, he rose to national prominence when, almost single-handed, he fought the Ku Klux Klan which ruled the state and city in the mid-1920's."¹

¹Lynd, Robert S. and Helen Merrell, Middletown in Transition: A Study in Cultural Conflicts, New York, 1937, p. 323. For the obituaries see the New York Times, March 28, 1936, p. 15; also the New York Herald Tribune, March 28, 1936, p. 10. The quotation about the "white-haired little man...." comes from Douglas, W. A. S., "The Mayor of Middletown", American Mercury, August, 1930, p. 476.

Middletown, now famous laboratory of the Lynds who gave its name to their two sociological studies, is in reality Muncie, Indiana. The first of these studies, Middletown: A Study in Contemporary American Culture,² is a landmark in American institutional history not only because it is the first exploration into "the social anthropology of contemporary life", but because it put the weight of authoritative research behind the keen analysis and cynicism of Sinclair Lewis' Main Street and Babbitt. America saw the whole panorama of its very existence laid bare before it.

Contrary to popular belief, Middletown is not a "typical" community. Uninformed citizens of Muncie like to think that their's has been chosen the "ideal" American city. Never have the Lynds made such claims. Their aim has been not to prove an elaborate thesis but rather "to record observed phenomena, thereby raising questions and suggesting possible fresh points of departure in the study of group behavior".³ In searching for a representative American community they struck upon Muncie because it seemed more nearly than any other city

²New York, 1929.

³Middletown, p. 3.

3

to fit the objective standards of selection which has been determined beforehand. Climate, rate of growth, diversified industrial activities, cultural advantages, population, and geography were a few of the characteristics considered.

In order to insure a complete overall picture it was necessary to choose a city which would lend itself best to the technique of field research. With the obvious mechanical limitations in mind it was decided that a city of between 25,000 and 50,000 inhabitants would be the most easily studied. "A city of this size, it was felt, would be large enough to have put on long trousers and to take itself seriously, and yet small enough to be studied from many aspects as a unit."⁴ Furthermore, in a city of whose total population Negroes and foreign-born form only an infinitesimal part important problems of racial dynamics do not impinge upon those purely cultural. This consideration might in itself be enough to disprove any of Middletown's claims to being "typical". Racial conflicts certainly are important in much of present day American industrialized society.

Stressing "its characteristic rather than its

⁴ Ibid., p. 8.

exceptional features", the final selection was oriented toward Muncie because it had no special "social problems" overshadowing the entire life of the community. A decade later Muncie could no longer meet the same selective requirements.⁵

My own reasons for choosing this subject about which to write a thesis are obvious. Muncie has been my home for almost as many years as I can remember and although I was very young at the time I still have vivid recollections of the great turmoil caused by many of the events described below. Especially do I remember the Ku Klux Klan and Geoge Dale as Mayor of Muncie. It was only natural then, with a few years of maturing on the college level plus a goodly exposure to problems of government that my interests should be directed back to the community of which I am a part.

With literally oceans of untouched material at my fingertips and my interests crystalized by the work of the Lynds I set out to explore the politics of Muncie. Invariably my attention was drawn to George R. Dale.... of all people! The man who without much reflection I had looked upon, along with the rest of Middletown, as a sort of circus freak. It was a standing joke in my family to

⁵Middletown in Transition, p. 215.

5

call my young sister, "George Dale", when, in childish stubbornness she was disobediant. Such an attitude superficially echoed Muncie's opinion of Dale, the incorrigible, the man who would not conform.

But curiosity turned to inquiry, inquiry to downright interest. As a result I have been studying this man's political career for over a year. In this thesis I have attempted to focus sharply upon what seems to me to be an important, if not the important phase of Dale's political life in connection with Muncie's

The difficulties of such an undertaking are obvious. First, there has been the problem of selecting material. Secondly, it is hardly an easy task to isolate a short period in the history of a community or a person and present an intelligible picture to the uninformed reader. Finally, the need for objectivity in a study of this kind does not have to be stressed. My own peculiar relation to the topic might go to prove Professor Lynd's statement the "the social scientist as an impersonal worker selecting problems and analyzing them with bloodless concern only for science exists no more than does the 'economic man'. Subjective factors inevitably intrude..."⁶

⁶Ibid, p. x.

Just a word on the documentation. Most of the material incorporated into this thesis has been taken from Muncie newspapers. Dale's attitude toward the community has been easily traceable through his own editorial columns. For a complete picture of Muncie's attitude toward Dale the task has not been so simple. The two daily papers, the Muncie Morning Star, and the Muncie Evening Press, are both Republican. That they can not be said to represent adequately local public opinion is shown by the Lynds.⁷ In an economy that dedicates itself to Mammon, "Middletown's press, like its pulpit, has largely surrendered its traditional role of leader; both have bartered their peculiar rights to proclaim sharply dissident truths for the right to be well supported by the reigning economy. And as a result, in the central areas of business, national politics, and civic pride they tend to reflect the point of view convenient to the purposes of this dominant core of business interests...."⁸ Such an analysis, however, could never be applied to Dale. The fact that money meant very little to him insured two things; one, that he could never accept the dominant symbols of the community and secondly, by

⁷Ibid., Chap. X, p. 373ff.

⁸Ibid., p. 381.

freeing himself from them he was able to write in any manner and about anything he pleased. He never bartered his birthright to the truth for a pot of the economic porridge.

Relatively speaking, the evening paper has always exercised the greatest amount of editorial independence.⁹ For this reason I have relied upon its editorials almost entirely to give the background picture of what Muncie thought of Dale. I do not pretend that the picture is accurate in detail but I do say that it approaches as nearly as is possible with the tools of research the general outlines of a nebulous public opinion.

⁹Ibid., p. 374.