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American civilization since the days of Abraham Lincoln, 1928.



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"AMERICAN CIVILIZATION SINCE THE DAYS OF  
ABRAHAM LINCOLN."

RABBI ABBA HILLEL SILVER.

THE TEMPLE, SUNDAY MORNING,

FEBRUARY 12, 1928, CLEVELAND.

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The years which have elapsed since the days of the Civil War have brought a great transformation in the life of the American people. The civilization in the midst of which Abraham Lincoln moved and had his being was very different from the civilization in which we today move and have our being. The Civil War marked the beginning of the great development, settlement and exploitation of the West.

At the time of the Revolutionary War the population of this country extended as far as the Alleghenies. At the time of the Civil War it had reached the Mississippi, but had not gone far beyond that. It is estimated that in 1861 there was just one half of a million of people between the Mississippi and the Pacific. But with the Civil War a great, almost a torrential, migration of people began into those vast spaces lying between the great river and the ocean. And many causes contributed to this condition. In the first place, there was the war itself. Thousands of people who did not believe in the war, who did not wish to participate in it, fled into the wide and open spaces of the far West and settled there. In the second place, the war put a great premium on the very things which the West could produce,--on produce, timber, the yield of the mines, and the prices became highly inflated, so that it was very profitable for people to settle across the Mississippi



and produce the things which the country needed in the prosecution of the war and for which it was willing to pay a high price.

A second factor which contributed to the development of the West was the free distribution of the land. The land hungry people along the Atlantic seaboard were attracted by the promise of free homesteads, free land, and the United States government encouraged people to settle in the West, especially the released soldiers.

In the third place, there was the lure of untold wealth, of gold and silver, copper and lead, which the mines of the West held in fabulous abundance. There was the lure of the vast forests where timber could be asked for, could be had for the mere labor. There were the great, almost endless plains for grazing, for the raising of cattle. And these facts attracted not only the poor but the adventurous from all parts of the world, and the story of the conquest of the West constitutes one of the most colorful and dramatic chapters in the annals of the migrations of peoples,--how cities sprang up overnight and disappeared over night; how fortunes were made and lost; how all kinds of people from all classes of people and of all quality met in that world and jostled together--bad men and good men, desperadoes, prospectors, adventurers, cowboys, missionaries, Mexicans, Chinese, whites and blacks; how the forces of nature were wrestled with and finally subjected; how the highway of empire was



stretched across valleys and across mountain peaks. All that constitutes an amazing tribute to the vast energy which was let loose in this country in the decades following the Civil War.

Then again the railroads soon helped to develop the great empire. In 1869 the Union Pacific was finally opened. By 1884 four other railways connected the Mississippi valley with the coast. These railways of course accelerated the colonization of that great empire. These railroads were particularly anxious to have new settlers come, first, to increase the revenue of freight and passenger traffic, and, secondly, to increase the value of their own lands which they had obtained as concessions from the government; so that a great propaganda was carried on not only in this country but abroad, to urge people to come out and settle in the West.

In a few decades the American frontier had shifted from the Mississippi to the Pacific, and had been practically wiped out. In a few decades free land was no longer obtainable in the United States. The continent had been settled and the pioneering spirit had reached its last frontier, and a new epoch was therefore begun in American life.

The years following the Civil War, too, saw the great industrialization of America. In 1860 one-sixth of the population of the United States lived in cities and towns; the other five-sixths on land. In 1900 one-third



of the people of the United States lived in cities. There took place a vast shifting of the population from the country to the town, and therefore a vast shifting of influence; political and economic influence passed into the hands of business and industry rather than the hands of the agriculturist.

Now that affected American culture radically. Small scattered farming communities never produced a great culture, a great civilization. The centers of civilization are the cities, and in so far as America in the last five or six decades gravitated towards the city, a truer culture and civilization was made possible. On the other hand, city life exerts a distinctive influence upon a people; it creates specific problems for a people, and after a few decades the American people emerges more urban, less provincial, more cultured but also less sturdy and less disciplined.

The industrialization of our country of course paved the way for the machine age in which we are now living. It made of America a unique and an anomalous country in the sight of the world. Our industrialization was so rapid and so intensive that it made of us a peculiar people and gave us a peculiar psychology, which any person in the world easily recognizes and designates as America. The machine age speeded up our life and standardized our life; the machine age reduced the individual and exalted the mass, laid emphasis upon mass



production and less emphasis upon personality in the individual. The machine age produced that peculiar and anomalous person known as the American business man,--a man who was clever at his job, amazingly clever at his job, at his peculiar task, but amazingly dull in almost everything else.

Then, too, the last five or six decades since the Civil War have given to the United States almost limitless wealth. In 1861 there were three millionaires in the United States; in 1897 there were 3,800 millionaires; in 1919 it is estimated that there were 42,000 millionaires in the United States, based on their income tax. Now the world has never seen this millionairization of a people in so short a time; the world has never witnessed such wealth production,--almost in the lifetime of one human being. And the American people was unaccustomed to wealth. The immigrants who came here were, most of them, poverty stricken people. They came here to seek a living; they were unaccustomed to wealth; they had no traditions of wealth; they had no traditions of culture; they had no restraints which come with the enjoyment of generations of wealth and leisure.

And so as a result of this untold wealth which poured into the land of the American people an era of vulgarization began in American life,--a coarse, brazen, aggressive, pushing, loud generation, whose only authority was the authority of wealth and whose only god was the god



of success.

We are emerging from that generation, but we have not yet completely emerged; and then, too, we now have the second generation and, in some instances, the third generation of those who earned the wealth, a leisure generation which is now using wealth which it itself did not produce--an exploiting class, a parasitic class of consumers who are not producers. Now wealth when it comes into the hands of people who did not produce it becomes a devastation and a corruption; it makes for all the vices which were accustomed to associate with decadence; it makes for leisure and self-indulgence and moral debility and the weakening of the fibers and the stamina of the people.

Now this menace of wealth the generation of Abraham Lincoln did not face, but our generation most assuredly and most decidedly does face. There is nothing vicious in wealth and there is no virtue in poverty. Wealth properly used by an individual or a people may lead to fine culture, to a fine art, to a true civilization, but wealth improperly used or abused makes for Babylon, for decadence.

The last five or six decades since the Civil War and the days of Abraham Lincoln, witnessing as it did the building up of business and industry, witnessed also a growing conflict between capital and labor. The rapid development of industry at times made for a ruthless



exploitation of those who produced wealth--the workingman. And in self-defense the laboring peoples of the United States were forced into organizations to protect their elementary rights, and American business and industry was short-sighted enough to suspect that these organizations of workingmen would make for the undermining of business and industry, and so for years and years American business and industry broadly and consistently fought the organization of the American working people, with the result that the last five or six decades in American history were blackened with the records of bitter industrial conflict, of strikes, boycotts, lockouts. One need only mention two or three of national scope,--the famous railroad strike of 1877; the Homestead steel strike of '92; the Pullman strike of Chicago of '94; the steel strike of 1919; the numerous coal, steel and textile strikes. One need but point to that which is going on before our very eyes at this moment,--a coal strike in the coal fields of Ohio and West Virginia. There workingmen have been driven to the verge of desperation by starvation, by having been deprived of their homes, being compelled to live in tents, by lack of raiment for themselves and their families.

One need but be reminded of this strike when the prosperous American people is called upon to send food and clothing to starving miners, as if Ohio and West Virginia were in the heart of dark Russia or in some famine district of China. There were strikes in the days of



Abraham Lincoln, of course; there were industrial disputes then; but the problem of the proper adjustment of interests between organized capital and organized labor has become a thousandfold more difficult and more complicated and more acute since Lincoln's day, and no proper solution has as yet been found for it.

The years which have elapsed have also witnessed a transformation in the attitude of the American people towards immigration. There is no longer free immigration to the United States. There was in the days of Abraham Lincoln. I mentioned a moment ago that the great railroads of this country, as well as the large industries of this country, as well as the government of this country, not only welcomed immigrants in the years which followed the Civil War but invited them and stimulated them coming to these shores, sent emissaries and agents abroad, urged them to come here, tantalizing them with promises. And they came. Between 1865 and the beginning of the twentieth century, for example, the Scandinavians poured into this country so rapidly that by the end of the nineteenth century there were as many Scandinavians in our Northwest,--Wisconsin, Minnesota and through that country, equal to one-fourth of the population of the whole of Norway and Sweden and Denmark. Think of the hundreds of thousands of Eastern European people who poured into this country and who built our railroads and paved our highways and worked in our mills and our shops



and our factories and drilled in our mines, builded up the prosperity which is ours!

We prided ourselves upon America as being the great melting pot of peoples, as holding out promise and hope for everyone, and we prided ourselves upon the fact that we looked upon all people as equal, and welcomed all immigrants provided they were not mentally or physically blemished, and provided they did not threaten to become dependent. But a change has come over the American people, induced first by the great war, and secondly, by the increased competition which has followed the increase in the population of this country. We have introduced an immigration law which is not only restrictive but selective. We no longer say that all men are equal. We now give preference to Nordics over Slavs or Mediterraneans or Semitic people; and since the days of Lincoln a wave of intolerance, a narrow nationalism or chauvinism has taken hold of the American people.

And lastly, we have become an imperial people since Lincoln's day. We have annexed other countries--the Philippines, Alaska; we extended our spheres of influence, backed by armed force, over the Caribbean country, over Central America; we are at this hour carrying on an unsanctioned, an unwarranted, illegal and an immoral war in Nicaragua at the behest of a few Wall Street bankers who prefer one set of officials in Nicaragua to another. This was inconceivable in the days of Lincoln.



We have become imperialistic to a degree, and the World War of course dragged us into the political affairs of Europe and of the world. The World War embroiled us and involved us inextricably in the affairs of the world. Our political horizons widened, our international responsibilities were multiplied. We have financial interests today in two-thirds of the countries of the world. We have become an international people. But in the days of Lincoln we were most decidedly a people living in what we call splendid isolation.

Now has Abraham Lincoln a message for us in the year 1928? Have his ideas any relevancy and applicability to our life today? I believe that Abraham Lincoln has a message for us. I believe the basic principles of conduct, whether in the life of an individual or of a people are eternal. They hold good today as they held good yesterday. You take the matter of the struggle between capital and labor, and listen to a word of counsel from Abraham Lincoln. You would not imagine, would you, that in the midst of the tribulations of war that Abraham Lincoln would have time to counsel with people on the problems of capital and labor. But he did, and this is what he said:

"Labor is prior to and independent of capital. Capital is only the fruit of labor and could never have existed if labor had not first existed. Labor is the superior of capital and deserves much the higher



consideration. The strongest bond of human sympathy outside of the family relations should be one uniting all working people of all nations, all tongues and kindreds. Nor should this lead to a war upon property or the owners of property. Property is the fruit of labor; property is desirable, is a positive good in the world. That some should be rich shows that others may become rich, and hence is just encouragement to industry and enterprise. Let not him who is houseless pull down the house of another, but let him labor diligently and build one for himself, thus by example assuring that his own shall be safe from violence when built."

The style is the characteristic style of Abraham Lincoln---terse, concise, homely and marvelously profound. And I make bold to say that this philosophy of Abraham Lincoln will stand the test of time.

Take Abraham Lincoln's view on the subject of immigration and the equality of people. I quote again. This is part of an address delivered by Abraham Lincoln in 1858 on the occasion of an Independence Day celebration.

"We find a race of men living in that day (the Revolutionary days; whom we claim as our fathers and grandfathers. They were iron men. They fought for the principles that they were contending for, and we understood by what they then did it has followed that the degree of prosperity which we now enjoy has come to us.

"We hold this annual celebration to remind



ourselves of all the good done in this process of time, of how it was done and who did it and how we are historically connected with it. But there is something else connected with it. We have besides these men, descended by blood from our ancestors, we have among us perhaps half our people who are not descendents of all of these men. They are men who have come from Europe, Germany and Ireland, French and Scandanavian,--men that have come from Europe themselves or whose ancestors have come hither and settled here, finding themselves where people win things. If they look back through this history to trace their connection with those days by blood, they find they have none. They cannot carry themselves back into that glorious epoch and make themselves feel that they are part of us by blood, but when they look through that old Declaration of Independence they find that those old men say that 'we hold these truths to be self-evident that all men are created equal,<sup>8</sup> and then they feel that that moral sentiment taught in that day evidences their relation to those men, that it is the father of all mortal principle in them and that they have a right to claim it as though they were blood of the blood and flesh of the flesh of the men who wrote the Declaration. And so they are. That is the electric cord of that Declaration that links the hearts of the patriotic and liberty-loving men together, that will link those patriotic hearts as long as the love of freedom exists in the minds of men throughout the world."



In other words, America is not a matter of blood but a matter of sacred sentiments and principles, and the true American is not merely he who traces his descent from the revolutionary fathers or from the days of the Mayflower, but one who traces his spiritual kinship with the spirit of those who wrote the Declaration or who established this commonwealth.

Again says Abraham Lincoln, and again I quote: "I am not a Know-nothing; that is certain. How could I be? How can anyone who abhors the oppression of Negroes be in favor of degrading classes of white people? Our progress in degeneracy appears to me to be pretty rapid. As a nation we began by declaring that 'all men are created equal.' We now practically read it 'All men are created equal except Negroes.' When the Know-nothings get control it will read, 'All men are created equal except Negroes and foreigners and Catholics.'" Think of the vision of the man! "When it comes to this, I shall prefer emigrating to some country where they make no pretense of loving liberty,---to Russia, for instance, where despotism can be taken pure and without the base alloy of hypocrisy."

We have drifted far from the spirit of Abraham Lincoln. Take Abraham Lincoln's attitude to the subject of our international relations--and with that I shall close. Abraham Lincoln says: "The United States have no enmities, animosities or rivalries and no interests



which conflict with the welfare, safety and rights or interests of any other nation. Their own prosperity, happiness and aggrandizement are sought most safely and advantageously through the preservation not only of peace on their own part but peace among all other nations."

I wonder whether we could say that today?  
I wonder whether we can say that we have no interests which conflict with the welfare, safety and rights of other people? ( I wonder whether Nicaragua is not a refutation of this spirit of Abraham Lincoln? And I wonder whether Abraham Lincoln's philosophy is not the only safe and moral philosophy for a great people such as ours to adopt?

Had I the time I would bring additional excerpts from the writings of this beloved son of American democracy, to illustrate how very modern, how very pertinent and how very helpful are the ideals and sentiments once expressed by the great emancipator in our own day.

As the years roll by and as the distance which separates Lincoln from the succeeding generation becomes longer (and longer, as the contours widen,) we are able to discover more and more what a remarkable personality was this of Abraham Lincoln, what a remarkable human being he was, and what gifts of insight and profound understanding of the soul of a man, and all men and all peoples and all humanity, belonged to Abraham Lincoln. His was the heart of America; his was the rugged strength which we call America; his was the vision and the hope and



the indomitable faith which we call America; his was the spaciousness, the openness, the freedom which we call America; his was the fairness, the honesty, the square deal which we call America; his was the good will, the friendliness, ~~the kindness~~, the neighborliness which we call America.

And would to God that in this day of ours, so involved, so tense, so shot through with problems and conflicts, that in this day of ours, some (Abraham Lincoln, kinsman of <sup>his</sup> us in spirit, would rise to point the way and lead <sup>us</sup> the host.





1. The year which has elapsed sees the Civil War have changed the two people quantitatively & qualitatively. Our civilization is quite different from that in which A.L. moved and had his being.

I. The C. W. began the devel. ~~and~~ the settle-  
ment & the exploitation of the West. At the  
beginning, the P. W. there were no more than  
1/2 m. people bet Iowa & the Pacific. Half  
this continent was empty; at the time, P. W.  
the our pop. had reached the alluvial mes.  
By 1860 - it had fairly settled the Middle  
West & reached the W. banks, the Miss. In  
the decade, the C. W. the great Westward  
push began which was to carry us further  
to the Pacific Ocean.

(a) The causes were many. In the first  
place the war itself. Many who did not wish  
to participate in the war fled into the far  
west. Again the war demanded the great things  
commodities which the vast free spaces, the W.  
could produce - & which commanded inflated  
prices. The lure of making money lured  
a thousand large numbers of new settlers.

(b) Again the free distribut. of land by the  
govt invited many from the land-hungry  
Northwest, the Atlantic, as well as immigrants  
from across the seas. (The U.S. Govt.)







land in the year following the C. W.

(d) Then came the railroads and knitted the W. half, the cent. together & accelerated the settlement a hundred fold. In 1869 the Union Pacific was completed. By 1884 there was 4000 miles of railway lines connecting the Miss. valley with the Pacific. ~~These~~ These railroads were very much interested in the settlement, the first for the rate, increased freight & passenger revenues & secondly for sale, increasing the value, the enormous tracts of land which they held ~~as a result of the~~ from the govt. They set about a foot print campaign, education in this country railroad men to come out & settle upon these lands.

(e) So that in a few decades the Am. frontier was wiped out. The continent was settled. Free land was no longer to be had. The pioneer spirit, the people ~~from us~~ had reached its last frontier. Thus an epoch came to a close.

§ II C. W. too marked by the industrialization of Am. country passed from an agrarian period to a period of industrial life. In 1860



1/69 pop. lived in towns; In 1900. 1/3.  
as a result Am. society gained the ascendancy  
in Am. pol. econ. life. As a result too  
the ~~credence~~ <sup>country</sup> Am. was radically affected.  
Small farming Am. produced no great  
culture. The centers, centers as the cities.  
On the other hand city life vitally affects  
the moral + reh. ideas + practices of a  
people. Am. became less after 50-60  
yrs of town life Am. emerged less  
prominent less narrow to its cultural  
involvement, less crude but also less  
sturdy and less disciplined.

~~III The modern industrialization of~~  
Am. The modern <sup>industrial</sup> ~~industrialization~~ heralded the machine  
age; the age of mass production, international  
business. <sup>spread</sup> ~~spread~~ The psych. of our  
people was affected. <sup>Standardization</sup> ~~Standardization~~  
of that factor went hand in hand  
with <sup>the indiv. was merged in the mass.</sup> ~~the indiv. was merged in the mass.~~ Human  
life became an incident in production.  
- not an end in itself. Man was subjected  
to the machine. The Am. man ~~became~~  
stood for the <sup>with right, an amazed crowd</sup> ~~as a~~ <sup>unique</sup>, one-sided,  
altogether anomalous person - clever  
at his job - but dull at the job of living.



~~III~~ <sup>III</sup> Wealth. From the mines & mills,  
the from timber land and grazing land  
wealth unbounded, unmeasurable began  
to pour in upon the Am. people.

In 1861 - 3 mill.

In 1897 - 3000 m.

In 1919 - 42,000 m.

This wealth came to people un-  
accustomed to wealth - it came  
suddenly. There were no standards of  
propriety or restraints, no traditions  
& culture; ~~and~~ and it soon began  
to manifest itself in all the show  
and pomp & vulgarity which are  
associated with the newly rich -  
a loud bray, covetous, ~~employment~~ <sup>pushing</sup>,  
civilization. followed - which made  
the Am. plutocracy a by-word in  
the world.

We now have a <sup>legion of</sup> ~~new~~ class  
wealthy which enjoys what  
it has not itself earned. The children  
of the grand children of the men who were  
the days of L. N. Shreve & the like laid  
the foundations of our future - are  
now depending what others earned.  
There has not even the restraining influence



which will exert upon a individual.

Now wealth was corrupt a nation.  
It enervated. It kept unemployed - wants  
for high civilization - Improving - wants  
for decadence. The Am. nation in the  
days of h. faced no such menace. It  
does not arm itself today.

IV. Industrial Conflict. - Amer. Prod.  
developed so rapidly - that it became  
at times unthless. The producer of  
wealth - the workingman - was exploited.  
He sought protection in organization.  
Industry, falsely believed, that the work.  
ing. would lead to ruin, industry  
- and brutally & consistently fought it.  
Strikes ensued - desperate, bloody -  
unknown in the days of h. - S.S.  
Railway Strike 1877; Homestead Steel  
Strike 1892; the Pullman Strike,  
Chicago 1894 - the numerous Coal  
& Steel <sup>strikes</sup> - the endless mining  
indust. conflicts which have continued  
to this day - A living & ready at hand  
example is the present ~~Coal~~ Strike  
in coal fields, Ohio & W. Va. - which  
has driven thousands to homelessness



and 3 members - remarkably in the  
land from this day a public appeal  
for good clothing - or if this was  
John & H. Va. was in the famine  
described by J. Purvis.

The <sup>arrangement</sup> ~~agreement~~ of the forces, Capital  
Helen is a problem which existed  
in the days J. A. but which has become  
a 100 fold more complicated & difficult  
& remains in our day - for which  
no satisfactory solution has as yet  
been found -

## V Free Immigration.

We welcomed immigration during the '60s.  
Following the Civil War, we used them.  
We wanted them. & they came for all  
parts of the world - & built our railways,  
& passed our highways - & worked in our  
mills & mines & factories - & helped  
to enrich this land.

We no longer welcome them now!  
A vast transformation! A union  
restriction law was passed. Limiting  
& selecting immigration -

In 1860 we believed that all  
men are equal - & any man, regardless







1. The years which have elapsed

1. Civil War began during Battle of West  
1/2 m - Rev. War.

~~Causes~~ Causes (a) War - pled - inflated

(b) Free Distribution of land. Land 1/4

(c) Land & Minerals etc. Control -  
- How towns etc.

(d) Railroads - 1869. Union Pac. -  
- propaganda for Colonization

(e) For a few decades - Am. frontier  
- land no longer free - Pioneer Spirit  
- an epoch had closed.

2. Industrialization A. 1860 - 1/6; 1900 - 1/3

- Bus & Trade. gain ascendancy

- Effects culture. Small family  
Am. life emerges less.

B. Machine Age - Standardization.

- one - sided Am. Bus. Man - Clever  
at his job.

3. W. Wealth 1861 - 3  
1897 - 3800  
1919 - 42000

- unconscious - valuing other -  
being class. Menace.  
- corrupt



7. Indust. Conflicts - Bus. Prod. developed  
rapidly - no class - of - freight

Railroad Strike. 1877

Hornet and Steel St. 1892

Pullman Strike, Ch. 1894.

Coal, Steel, Textile -

- Ohio & W. Va.

No Solution found

8. Free Immigration. We welcomed them  
- Restrictive legislation.

- In 1880 - all men equal. - Nord's

9. Imperialism - Uragua.  
Under War -



The Great War entangled us in the affairs  
of Europe - and irreducibly to westward  
so! Our pol. horizon has widened. Our  
int. problems have multiplied. We  
have become financially & pol. interde-  
pendent in 2/3 of the continent, the earth.

2. Has L. a message for this age so vastly  
diff. from his own? I believe that he  
has - elem. princ. of <sup>moral</sup> conduct hold fast  
for all time.

1. ~~Expansion - L. believed in a great Amer-  
ica.~~

2. ~~Industrialization~~

(3) 1. Imperialism . p. 205.

① 1. Labor - p. 297 and 299  
- will stand test of time.

② 1. Immigrants - not blood but principles  
p. 92. and ~~123~~ 69



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American Civilization  
Since The Days of  
Abraham Lincoln

