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The “True Worship of Life”:
Changing Notions of Happiness, Morality, and Religion
in the United States, 1890–1940¹

In 1979, the cultural historian Warren I. Susman published an influential article on changing notions of the self and their relation to modernity during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Basing his case on the analysis of popular self-help literature, Susman argued that during these decades a shift took place from a notion of selfhood based on character to one based on personality². Whereas nineteenth-century Americans discussed *character* as an organic and permanent attribute of a person and as intertwined with a self potentially governed by rationality, twentieth-century Americans connected the alternative concept, *personality*, to adjectives such as dynamic, energetic, and masculine. This new notion of the self emphasized not self-control and self-sacrifice for high moral values, but personal self-fulfillment and – even if it may sound paradoxical – a kind of affectionate supremacy over others, to be achieved by self-mastery and hard work: “Every American was to become a performing self.”³ Susman, along with other authors making similar arguments, such as David Morgan, Judy Hilkey, Jackson Lears, and Richard Rabinowitz, interpreted this shift in hegemonic ideas about the self as resulting from the developing culture of mass consumption. The changing social order and its newly negotiated rules, they asserted, should be understood in relation to the sort of competitive society associated especially with the country’s urban centers⁴.

¹ I would like to thank Angelika Epple, Bielefeld, and Alan Lessoff, Normal/Ill., for their most valuable comments on an earlier version of this article.

² Warren I. Susman, “Personality” and the Making of Twentieth-Century Culture, in: *John Higham, Paul K. Conkin* (eds.), *New Directions in American Intellectual History* (Baltimore 1979) 212–226 (reprinted in: *Warren I. Susman, Culture as History. The Transformation of American Society in the Twentieth Century* [New York 1984] 271–285).

³ *Susman*, “Personality” 220.

⁴ *David Morgan*, *Protestants and Pictures. Religion, Visual Culture, and the Age of American Mass Production* (New York, Oxford 1999) 340–341; *Judy Hilkey*, *Character is capital. Success manuals and manhood in Gilded Age* (Chapel Hill 1997); *T. J. Jackson Lears*, *From Salvation to Self-Realization. Advertising and the Therapeutic Roots of the Consumer Culture, 1880–1930*, in: *Richard Wightman Fox, T. J. Jackson Lears* (eds.), *The Culture of Consumption. Critical Essays in American History, 1880–1980* (New York 1983) 1–38. According to Richard Rabinowitz’s study of Protestant piousness in New England, this change was

Susman was by no means the first observer to consider the concept of personality as a distinct sign of the modern age in America. Already in 1935, Dutch historian Johan Huizinga – whose writings ranged well beyond his renowned intellectual and cultural histories of the Renaissance and the Early Modern era⁵ – had used different terms with similar intent in his observations on American society. In the essay, *In the Shadow of Tomorrow*, Huizinga remarked:

The increase of security, of comfort, and of the possibilities of want-gratification, in short the greater ease of living, has had two results. On the one hand, it has prepared the soil for all forms of renunciation of life: philosophical denial of its value, purely emotional spleen of aversion from life. On the other hand it has instilled the belief in the right to happiness. It has made people expect things from life. Related to this there is another contrast. The ambivalent attitude which wavers between the renunciation and the enjoyment of life is peculiar to the individual alone. The community, however, without hesitation and with more conviction than ever before, accepts earthly life as the object of all striving and action. It is indeed a true worship of life⁶.

At first sight this looks like a typical example of the cultural-pessimistic, conservative-idealistic criticism of contemporary society that was formulated in those days by many European intellectuals, particularly conservative Germans as varied as Oswald Spengler and Thomas Mann but including even liberal authors such as Siegfried Kracauer⁷. Upon closer inspection, however, it becomes obvious that Huizinga pointed to an important aspect of a new cult of worldliness which later became essential to Susman's analysis of changing constructions of the self. The new outlook on selfhood and its related emotional style, which gave priority to well-being and self-fulfillment, contained ambiguities and contradictions that were plain to an observer with Huizinga's cultural-pessimistic perspective⁸.

becoming evident already by about 1850; see *Richard Rabinowitz*, *The Spiritual Self in Everyday Life. The Transformation of Personal Religious Experience in Nineteenth-Century New England* (Boston 1989).

⁵ See *Johan Huizinga*, *America. A Dutch Historian's Vision, from Afar and Near*, translated, with an Introduction and Notes, by *Herbert H. Rowen* (New York 1972); *Christoph Strupp*, *Johan Huizinga, Geschichtswissenschaft als Kulturgeschichte* (Göttingen 2000) 150–160.

⁶ *Johan Huizinga*, *In the Shadow of tomorrow. A diagnosis of the spiritual distemper of our time* (London 1936) 91–92.

⁷ See *Oswald Spengler*, *Der Untergang des Abendlandes. Umriss einer Morphologie der Weltgeschichte*, 2 vol. (München 1918/1922); *Siegfried Kracauer*, *Das Ornament der Masse*, in: *idem*, *Das Ornament der Masse. Essays* (Frankfurt a. M. 2005) 50–63. On the overall subject, *Georg Bollenbeck*, *Eine Geschichte der Kulturkritik. Von Rousseau bis Günther Anders* (München 2007) 199–232.

⁸ Moritz Julius Bonn offered a typical, almost clichéd version of the cultural-pessimistic view of modern American society. Sarcastically, he noted: “The delicate promptings of the softly swinging human soul, as it rises to the ether, are killed in favour of a kind of materialism which is satisfied with being greedy and hedonistic but nevertheless stays to be suffering from life ... What has been developing by reverence is replaced by that which is boldly wanted, what is warmly and emotionally flowing is driven away by sober-cold thought, what is unique-personal is strangled by the conventional-factual.” (*Moritz Julius Bonn*, *Die Kultur der Vereinigten Staaten von Amerika* [Berlin 1930] 6).

This essay builds upon these observations by Huizinga and Susman. It puts them to the practical test demanded by Susman, who noted that “more specific analysis of the cultural forms of our century” would be needed to provide empirical support for his generalizations concerning the emergence of a prevalent “concept of personality”⁹. While historians such as Andrew R. Heinze have raised important objections to Susman’s thesis, most recent research seems to follow Susman in the assumption that during the period under discussion the hegemonic concept of the self did change fundamentally¹⁰. In this essay, I will offer two possible illustrations of the change that Susman’s posited. The cases presented here underscore how widespread the patterns identified by Susman probably were, since they concern matters on which scholars of selfhood and emotional style do not usually concentrate: the popularization of eugenic thought and new interpretations of Jesus Christ offered in Protestant publications aimed at mass markets. My starting point is simple: If cultural change concerning the concept of the self was indeed as far reaching as scholars have claimed, it must have had been manifest in areas outside the focal points of contemporary discourse on the self as well.

The following analyses amounts to a kind of historical exploratory test drilling intended to check the plausibility of this well-known hypothesis about cultural change. My analysis draws as well upon Peter Stearns’s hypotheses concerning changes in American “emotional style”, an approach to modernity and cultural change that parallels Susman’s explorations of the cultural dimensions of selfhood. In the mass-media discourse on which this essay depends, changes in emotional style as conceived by Stearns are right away manifest, while the concepts of personality outlined by Susman are usually implied or an undercurrent, though they are visible upon close reading¹¹. In contrast to Susman, this essay does not delve into causal explanations of these changing cultural patterns; instead it investigates ways of identifying and tracing these new forms of identity and expression¹². My approach moves from popularizing discourses evident in media – so to speak from the surfaces themselves – to the substantive changes of attitude. This has the advantage of avoiding some of the unprovable assertions about cause and effect that have invited criticism of Susman’s formulation.

⁹ *Susman*, “Personality” 222.

¹⁰ According to Andrew R. Heinze, the concept of personality did not at all supersede that of character. Rather personality and character were overlapping concepts at least until the 1930s. Furthermore, the changing meaning of the “self” was not a consequence of consumer culture, in Heinze’s view, but instead was connected to the apparently increasing ethnic fragmentation of society and, parallel to this, to new psychological interpretations of the self as being pathologically split. Within this framework, “self-adjustment” seemed essential; an “integrated personality” became the goal. Notwithstanding his criticism of Susman, even Heinze does not deny a fundamental change in the concept of the self but offers different reasons for it. See *Andrew R. Heinze*, *Schizophrenia Americana. Aliens, Alienists, and the “Personality Shift” of Twentieth-Century Culture*, in: *American Quarterly* 55/2 (2003) 227–256.

¹¹ See *Hanno Hardt*, *In the Company of Media. Cultural Constructions of Communication, 1920s–1930s* (Boulder, Colo. 2000).

¹² *Susman*, “Personality” 222.

In the essay's first section, I will explain the basic elements of this new "worship of life", to refer again to Huizinga's term. I will then describe how the newspaper coverage of a spectacular case of murder in Chicago in 1930 illustrated the mass-media staging of this new personality concept. In a second section, I am going to analyze the popularization strategies of the eugenics movement, which was influential in the United States in the first decades of the twentieth century; and I will show how certain lines within the popularization of eugenics indeed manifested the new "worship of life". Finally, in the third section, I will pursue the question of to what degree this new emotional style could also be grounded on religion. My analysis reveals that the famous bestseller, *The Man Nobody Knows* by Bruce Barton (1925), also illustrates the new cultural patterns described in their different ways by Huizinga, Susman, and Stearns.

"Worship of Life" as a New Emotional Style

In the first decades of the twentieth century, many Americans were convinced that a fundamental change was happening within their society. Especially Protestants from older ethnic groups, who had either been born and raised in the country or in small towns or who identified with small-town values though they lived in an urban environment, understood rapidly increasing divorce rates, the new leisure-time culture of cinema, jazz, and dance halls, as well as changing behavioral norms to be indications of a cultural decline. This sense of decaying standards frequently prompted xenophobic reactions¹³. World War I and its aftermath, meanwhile, severely damaged the optimistic outlook on politics and society that had animated progressivism¹⁴. In the post-war era, resentment against the seemingly negative effects of modernity became increasingly apparent among the native, white, middle classes. The underside of the clichéd cultural experimentation of the era was widespread cultural suspicion, political rancor, and social tension, themselves stereotyped as animated by xenophobia and fundamentalism¹⁵.

Many historians have questioned the more simplistic versions of this familiar account of the Jazz Age. However, this version of the 1920s contains a large el-

¹³ On this see recently *Thomas Welskopp*, *Amerikas große Ernüchterung. Eine Kulturgeschichte der Prohibition* (Paderborn 2010). Also informative on popularization discourses: *David E. Ruth*, *Inventing the Public Enemy. The Gangster in American Culture, 1918–1934* (Chicago 1996).

¹⁴ *Maureen A. Flanagan*, *America Reformed. Progressives and Progressivisms, 1890s–1920s* (New York 2006) 261–282; *Arthur S. Link*, *What Happened to the Progressive Movement in the 1920's*, in: *American Historical Review* 64/4 (1959) 833–851.

¹⁵ See *Lynn Dumenil*, *Modern Temper. American Culture and Society in the 1920s* (New York 1995); *Flanagan*, *America Reformed*; *Morton Keller*, *Regulating a New Society. Public Policy and Social Change in America, 1900–1933* (Cambridge, Mass. 1994); *Richard M. Abrams*, *The Burdens of Progress, 1900–1929* (Glenview, Ill. 1978); *William Leuchtenburg*, *The Perils of Prosperity, 1914–1932* (Chicago 1993 [1958]).

ement of truth, though it insufficiently accounts for radical cultural changes, for example changes in emotional style evident in different ways among moderns and fundamentalists alike. Only in the course of the past few years has the history of emotions developed into a thriving field of research. Many basic questions about such research still remain unanswered, such as how far one should take into account a natural-scientific understanding of emotions and thus to what degree emotions must be imagined as anthropologically stable or culturally variable¹⁶. Researchers into these matters often ignore epistemological problems; heuristic approaches predominate. This leads historians to conceptualize the analysis of supposedly emotion-based expressions more or less hermeneutically. This essay shares this potential flaw because it assumes that the way in which individuals and groups deal with emotions depends on social situations and that ideals and norms of emotion depend essentially on the parameters of social inequality such as class, gender, or ethnicity and race¹⁷.

The works in this field published by Carol and Peter Stearns since the 1980s provide for the United States an empirically valuable foundation on which one may build. Essential for their approach is the concept of “emotionology”, which they define as the “attitudes or standards that a society, or a definable group within a society, maintains toward basic emotions and their appropriate expression”¹⁸. The Stearns concede the obvious point that emotional life and individual emotional experiences are hardly accessible to the historian¹⁹. In line with this general approach, in this essay, I will try to show by way of two examples that in the United States between 1890 and 1940 an emotional style gained acceptance – as an idea, not necessarily in practice – which understood vitality and individual happiness both in the material and the spiritual sense to be the result of physical strength, control of emotional states and rational thought. Following Huizinga, I call this emotional style “worship of life”. The Dutch scholar’s formulation effectively indicated what this style was replacing: the feelings of sympathy and grief

¹⁶ William Reddy, *The Navigation of Feeling. A Framework for the History of Emotions* (Cambridge 2001), is a useful exception.

¹⁷ On the historiography of emotions in the United States and elsewhere, *Peter N. Stearns*, *Emotions History in the United States: Goals, Methods, and Promise*, in: *Jessica C. E. Gienow-Hecht* (ed.), *Emotions in American History. An International Assessment* (New York 2010) 15–27; *Jan Plamper*, *The History of Emotions: An Interview with William Reddy, Barbara Rosenwein, and Peter Stearns*, in: *History and Theory* 49/2 (2010) 237–265; *Ute Frevert*, *Was haben Gefühle in der Geschichte zu suchen?*, in: *Geschichte und Gesellschaft* 35/2 (2009) 183–208; *Frank Bösch*, *Manuel Borutta*, *Medien und Emotionen in der Moderne. Historische Perspektiven*, in: *the same* (ed.), *Die Massen bewegen. Medien und Emotionen in der Moderne* (Frankfurt a. M. 2006) 13–41.

¹⁸ *Carol Zisowitz Stearns*, *Peter N. Stearns*, *Emotionology. Clarifying the History of Emotions and Emotional Standards*, in: *American Historical Review* 90 (1985) 813–836, here 813. For examples of case studies: *Carol Zisowitz Stearns*, *Anger. The Struggle for Emotional Control in America’s History* (Chicago 1986); *Peter N. Stearns*, *Jealousy. The Evolution of an Emotion in American History* (New York 1989); *Peter N. Stearns*, *American Cool. Constructing a Twentieth Century Emotional Style* (New York 1994).

¹⁹ See, most recently, *Frevert*, *Was haben Gefühle in der Geschichte zu suchen?* 206–207.

which in the United States of the Victorian era had been understood to be essential points of reference for the *conditio humana*²⁰.

Such a development was not specifically American. In Europe as well by the early 1900s, ideas began to take hold concerning the training of one's own body as a necessity for fulfillment and success in modern society. This discourse assumed the well-trained body to be male, while the emotions that one needed to master were for the most part categorized as female²¹. In Europe, however, these changes were conditioned by the priority given in doubtful circumstances to the general welfare as opposed to individual well-being, as explained in Inge Baxmann's comparative study of Germany and France, among other works²². Even with regard to modern free dance, a genuinely individualist fashion of the 1920s, or vegetarianism and similar tendencies within the so-called life reform movement, national or collective well-being, at least in theory, stood at the center of the worldview and politics of such movements²³. According to these ideas, the individual's perfection was always a means toward higher ends.

In contrast to the nationalistic or collectivist tendency within European movements for self-cultivation, in the United States a way of understanding emerged which recognized the individual's personal development as an end in itself, without reference to an overriding social or collective well-being. Even within politicized discourses about population, the individual was now understood as the "nucleus" from which everything else would develop²⁴. This trend had consequences, particularly for couples and for family life. In place of the older "morality of self-denial", a "morality of self-fulfillment" came to predominate²⁵. These changes

²⁰ See *Peter N. Stearns*, *American Cool. Constructing an Twentieth Century Emotional Style*, (New York 1994) 16–57; *Stanley Cohen*, *Rebellion against Victorianism. The Impetus for Cultural Change in 1920s America* (New York 1991) 157–158; *Michael McGerr*, *A Fierce Discontent. The Rise and Fall of the Progressive Movement in America, 1870–1920* (New York 2003) 248–278; *Daniel Joseph Singal*, *The War Within. From Victorianism to Modernist Thought in the South, 1919–1945* (Chapel Hill 1982) 11–33.

²¹ For an overview, *Daniel Siemens*, *Von Marmorleibern und Maschinenmenschen. Neue Literatur zur Körpergeschichte in Deutschland zwischen 1900 und 1936*, in: *Archiv für Sozialgeschichte* 47 (2007) 639–682.

²² See *Inge Baxmann*, *Mythos Gemeinschaft. Körper- und Tanzkulturen in der Moderne*, München 2000; *Michael Brenner*, *Gideon Reuveni* (eds.), *Emanzipation durch Muskelkraft. Juden und Sport in Europa* (Göttingen 2006).

²³ See *Ivonne Hardt*, *Politische Körper. Ausdruckstanz, Choreographien des Protests und die Arbeiterkulturbewegung in der Weimarer Republik* (Münster 2004); *Daniel Siemens*, "Wahre Tugend mit Beefsteaks unvereinbar". Diskurse um Ethik und Ästhetik im deutschen Vegetarismus, 1880–1940, in: *Jens Elberfeld*, *Marcus Otto* (eds.), *Das schöne Selbst. Zur Genealogie des modernen Subjekts zwischen Ethik und Ästhetik* (Bielefeld 2009) 133–168. On vegetarianism see also *James Gregory*, *Of Victorians and Vegetarians. The Vegetarian Movement in Nineteenth-Century Britain* (London 2007).

²⁴ See *Betsy L. Nies*, *Eugenic Fantasies. Racial Ideology in the Literature and Popular Culture of the 1920's* (New York 2002) 33.

²⁵ See *Anita Ernst Watson*, *Fading Shame. Divorce Stigma in American Culture, 1882–1939*, (diss. thesis, Reno, Nev. 1997); *Elaine Tyler May*, *Great Expectations. Marriage and Divorce*

prompted widespread insecurity, along with confusion between old and new emotional standards, which overlapped and coexisted uneasily. It was most of all in the mass media – especially the daily newspapers until the 1930s – where depictions of these changes appeared and where they gained sometimes inadvertent support. This was particularly clear in some cases of intensively covered, sensationalized criminal proceedings. Such accounts hinge on discussions of norms and their violation and thus illustrate changing assumptions about behavior standards and the rationale behind them²⁶.

I would like to illustrate this by an extreme but nevertheless indicative example, the coverage of the murder trial of Dorothy Pollak in Chicago in 1930. She was accused of having shot her husband, who had been almost thirty years her senior. As a motive for her deed, allegedly committed in the heat of the moment, she stated that her husband had regularly beaten her. Furthermore, he was said to have betrayed her several times, and he threatened her with a knife before she shot him. However, all evidence indicated that the murder had been premeditated. The husband, who had seen his wife's future most of all in the home, had prevented the perpetrator from pursuing her own outside ambitions²⁷. A number of observers – especially female commentators – justified the murder by referring to changes in shared emotional standards. For them, Dorothy Pollak was a model of justified rebellion, both as an avenger against oppression by unfaithful and violent males and as a self-confident young woman who intended to become self-supporting and successful. Her deed enforced the right to individual happiness granted to everybody. Emotions of lasting personal dissatisfaction were perceived as a grave burden that, many now believed, one was entitled to fight, even violently.

Newspaper reporting on this trial was highly gendered: All journalists described the defendant's beauty and her stylish clothes. They emphasized her blue eyes and several times referred to the age gap between her and her husband. As suggested by such reports, her beauty and youth compared to her husband's older age and his alleged philandering might have helped to justify the deed. "It was all his fault. He was too old for her", a twenty-eight-year-old female observer of the trial stated. A thirty-four-year-old man remarked: "He was too old for her. She was entitled to shoot him."²⁸ One should not overestimate this case, which was natural for newspaper sensationalism and exaggeration. Nevertheless, statements such as those quoted above afford an idea of the intense, even violent character of efforts to attain individual happiness and indirectly a happy society. Beauty and youth were not just aesthetic categories. In the context of the bio-political dis-

in Post-Victorian America (Chicago 1980); *Paula S. Fass*, *The Damned and the Beautiful. American Youth in the 1920s* (New York 1977).

²⁶ *Daniel Siemens*, *Metropole und Verbrechen. Die Gerichtsreportage in Berlin, Paris und Chicago, 1919–1933* (Stuttgart 2007) 43–57, 267–269.

²⁷ *Robert J. Casey*, "Widow Who Killed Husband Wins on Reasonable Doubt", in: *Chicago Daily News* (September 1, 1932).

²⁸ Quoted in "Closing Scenes of Pollak Case", *Chicago Tribune* (September 2, 1932). For more on the press coverage of this trial: *Siemens*, *Metropole und Verbrechen* 356–359.

course, they also conveyed a sense of struggle and conflict. This sensibility was reinforced by the eugenics movement, which since the turn of the century had employed aggressive rhetoric in its fight for the genetic improvement of American society and which drew conclusions about alleged genetic qualities from people's outer physical features²⁹. For this reason, it makes sense to analyze evidence of the "worship of life" mindset in the eugenics discourse of those days.

The Eugenics Movement as a Contingent Utopia: The Promise of Happiness through Good Genes

Since the early twentieth century, eugenics-related ideas had gained a considerable following among the white middle classes. At the center of this movement was the notion that the selection of a partner according to allegedly science-based heredity principles contributed to "race betterment". Eugenicians claimed to offer a key to the improvement not just of people's physical qualities but also their mental capabilities. In the late nineteenth century, Francis Galton, the English formulator and proponent of eugenics, defined it as "the study of the agencies under social control that may improve or impair the racial qualities of future generations, either physically or mentally"³⁰. Spread and popularized by European scientists, especially criminologists and psychiatrists, eugenics gained currency as a domain of science that promised solutions to a variety of social problems. Its spread in the United States has seemed to historians to be an indicator of the collective fears of the Anglo-American upper and middle classes in the face of an increasingly pluralist, urban society³¹. The fact that by 1928, 376 universities and colleges offered eugenics lectures illustrates the pervasiveness of this trend³².

²⁹ Publicist Albert E. Wiggam offered a typical mixture of aesthetics, racism and pseudo-science in his book *The Fruit of the Family Tree*: "We can have almost any kind of race of human beings we want ... We want ugly women in America and we are getting them in millions. For nearly a generation until the recent immigration law was enacted, three or four shiploads have been landing at Elis Island every week. If they are all allowed to breed the future 'typical American', then the future typical American is going to be as devoid of personal beauty as this vast mass of humanity ... And the moment we lose beauty we lose intelligence." *Albert E. Wiggam, The Fruit of the Family Tree* (New York 1924) 262.

³⁰ *Francis Galton, Inquiries Into Human Faculty and Its Development* (New York 1907 [1883]) 17n.

³¹ Within those segments of society to which eugenic thought appealed, it tended to reinforce prevailing notions of gender roles within families, through the assumption that a dominant father and a subordinate mother was more or less a law of nature that served the welfare of children. *Laura L. Lovett, Conceiving the Future. Pronatalism, Reproduction, and the Family in the United States, 1890–1939* (Chapel Hill 2007); *Wendy Kline, Building a Better Race. Gender, Sexuality, and Eugenics from the Turn of the Century to the Baby Boom* (Berkeley 2005 [2001]).

³² *Laura L. Lovett, "Fitter Families for Future Firesides": Florence Sherbon and Popular Eugenics*, in: *The Public Historian* 29/3 (2007) 69–85, esp. 76. On the history of eugenics in

The founding of the American Eugenics Society in 1922 marked the start of a period of intense pro-eugenics campaigning. In the previous two decades, an alarmist attitude had become commonplace, characterized by dire warnings about the alleged dangers of genetically based criminality, the spread of “inferiors” who threatened the foundations of society, as well as the alleged misery of bearing disabled children³³. The tone shifted in the 1920s, with more positive messages taking over from fear-mongering in pro-eugenics publications aimed at a popular audience. Increasingly eugenicists counted on advertising to spread their ideas. Although not exclusively eugenicist in nature, the period’s fitter-family competitions were infused with eugenicist and scientific-racist attitudes. Families from rural Kansas would, for example, compete for “Kansas’ best crop”. These events, often located next to the animal husbandry exhibits at county and state fairs, allegedly promoted “Fitter Families for Future Firesides”. They followed the tradition of earlier “Better Baby” competitions and like them combined the spread of eugenic thought through public health campaigns. However compared to the better-baby competitions, fitter-family events had a more elaborate program usually finishing with an extended festival for the entire family or – even more up to date – a motorcade through town. By the 1930s, such competitions took place in more than forty states³⁴.

the United States, *Mark A. Largent*, *Breeding Contempt. The History of Coerced Sterilization in the United States* (New Brunswick, N.J. 2008); *Nancy Ordover*, *American Eugenics. Race, Queer Anatomy, and the Science of Nationalism* (Minneapolis, Minn. 2003); *Steven Selden*, *Inheriting Shame. The Story of Eugenics and Racism in America* (New York 1999); *Ian Robert Dowbiggin*, *Keeping America Sane. Psychiatry and Eugenics in the United States and Canada, 1880–1940* (Ithaca 1997); *Nicole Hahn Rafter*, *Creating Born Criminals* (Urbana 1997); *Marouf Arif Hasian Jr.*, *The Rhetoric of Eugenics in Anglo-American Thought* (Athens 1996); *Mark H. Haller*, *Eugenics. Hereditarian Attitudes in American Thought* (New Brunswick, N.J. 1963). For international comparisons, *Mathew Thomson*, *Mental hygiene as an international movement*, in: *Paul Weindling* (ed.), *International health organizations and movements, 1918–1939* (Cambridge 1995) 283–304; *Stefan Kühl*, *Die Internationale der Rassisten. Aufstieg und Niedergang der internationalen Bewegung für Eugenik und Rassenhygiene im 20. Jahrhundert* (Frankfurt a.M. 1997); *idem*, *The Nazi Connection. Eugenics, American Racism, and German National Socialism* (New York 1994).

³³ See *Martin S. Pernick*, *The Black Stork. Eugenics and the Death of “Defective” Babies in American Medicine and Motion Pictures since 1915* (New York 1996); *Harry Olson*, *Crime and Heredity*, in: *Research Studies of Crime as Related to Heredity*, edit. by Chicago Municipal Court (Chicago 1925) 9–29. For examples of popular, non-fiction books see *Richard L. Dugdale*, *The Jukes: A Study in Crime, Pauperism, Disease and Heredity* (New York 1877); *Henry H. Goddard*, *The Kallikak-Family. A Study in the Heredity of Feeble-Mindness* (New York 1912); *Lothrop Stoddard*, *The Rising Tide of Color against White World-Supremacy* (New York 1920).

³⁴ *Christine Rosen*, *Preaching Eugenics. Religious Leaders and the American Eugenics Movement* (New York 2004) 111–114; *Lovett*, “Fitter Families for Future Firesides”. On “Baby-Contests”, also see *Annette K. Vance Dorey*, *Better Baby Contests. The Scientific Quest for Perfect Childhood Health in the Early Twentieth Century* (Jefferson, N.C. 1999). On the popularity of eugenics in the 1930s, see *Susan Currell*, *Christina Cogdale* (eds.), *Popular Eugenics. National Efficiency and American Mass Culture in the 1930s* (Athens, Ohio 2006).

One of the most influential promoters of eugenic thought in the 1920s was Albert Edward Wiggam (1871–1957). His books exemplify the ways that American eugenicists mixed individuality, morality, and religiosity. Like so many figures in the eugenics movement, Wiggam, born in a small village in southern Indiana, was a self-educated scientist and at the same time a gifted showman. Between 1910 and 1930, this unprepossessing man became a sought-after freelance lecturer who traveled throughout the United States and, according to his own accounts, reached more than one million paying listeners from New York to Los Angeles³⁵. In addition, his popular books on eugenics, published by respectable publishing houses every three or four years after 1922, had excellent sales figures³⁶. Wiggam concentrated on an urban audience, whereas the “Fitter Family” competitions – with their nostalgic glorification of healthy country life and the farmer family with many children – addressed rural America. At eugenics events in rural areas and small towns, the family took precedence over the individual³⁷. By contrast, Wiggam was a representative of a more individualistic, urban-oriented version of eugenics. He addressed listeners’ “worries for themselves” and brought more to the center of discussion the struggle for social and economic success, which was taken as proof of a moral way of life and evidence of one’s moral superiority³⁸.

The goal of all eugenics-related efforts, as continually stressed by Wiggam and his compatriots, was “permanent race improvement” – race in this context implying white, Nordic Americans. He celebrated North American civilization as superior to the rest of the world, a perspective of course not exclusive to eugenicists but certainly embraced by them³⁹. In his view, people were shaped not only by their inherited characteristics but also by their environment. Unfortunately, Wiggam explained, education and religion could not be inherited, but some degree of “religious temperament” could⁴⁰. From this situation, he concluded that each individual was obliged to use his or her talents in the best possible way in order to live autonomously and to lead a morally exemplary life.

Wiggam postulated that economic, creative, or intellectual skills were immediately linked to a moral way of life. As he put it: “The higher up we go in skill – that is, in intelligence – the higher up we go in sound morals and good citizenship.”⁴¹ For Wiggam, morality meant not only the orientation of one’s own way of life

³⁵ *Rosen*, *Preaching Eugenics* 128–132; *Albert E. Wiggam*, “The Apostle of Efficiency” (brochure, no place, no date), <http://sdr.lib.uiowa.edu/traveling-culture/chau1/pdf/wiggam/6/brochure.pdf>, p. 4 (accessed: March 20, 2009).

³⁶ By 1926, four years after its initial publication, *The New Decalogue of Science* reached its ninth printing, by which time *The Fruit of the Family Three*, published in 1924, was in its eighth printing. *Nies*, *Eugenic Fantasies* 31.

³⁷ *Lovett*, “Fitter Families for Future Firesides” 79–84.

³⁸ The title of one of his last publications is telling: *Albert E. Wiggam*, *New Techniques of Happiness* (New York 1948). On economic success as a component of the concept of personality, *Susman*, “Personality” 221.

³⁹ See e.g. *Albert E. Wiggam*, *The Next Age of Man* (New York 1927) 171.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.* 171–173.

⁴¹ *Ibid.* 191.

based upon a well-developed conscience, religious rules, or a set of abstract values. A moral life also entailed letting oneself be guided by “scientific” research and its insights. In recent centuries, Wiggam asserted, science had reshaped the world, making possible an unprecedented degree of well-being and material prosperity. “Morality is merely adequate and effective adjustment”, he proclaimed⁴². Here, the shift toward the concept of personality as postulated by Susman becomes particularly obvious, with morality depicted by Wiggam very much in relational and instrumental terms. Wiggam’s incoherent counsel also raises one of the essential paradoxes of this new concept of the self: How in practice could people square the oft-repeated requirement of modern life, “Express your individuality!”, with the idea of “adequate adjustment”?

Nevertheless, one of the advantages of this perspective was obvious. People who were economically successful and socially accepted could also believe themselves to be ethically exemplary. Furthermore, such people could now assume themselves bearers of “good” genes. In this way, Wiggam provided his audience with biological and – as might be particularly important in times of intensified social change – stable criteria for the positive and permanent exclusion of other, less-favored segments: African Americans, immigrants, criminals. He interpreted existing social inequality as the logical result of different hereditary factors. In this way, differences of class and race were naturalized. Wiggam claimed that poor people were in that situation for the most part “because they do not possess by nature the ability, temperament and energy to become rich”⁴³. And even if for environmental reasons African Americans supposedly developed much better in America than in Africa, they were simply overtaxed by the complexity of American reality. On account of their innate characteristics, Wiggam stated, blacks were not able to perform the necessary “higher integrative processes of the nervous system”⁴⁴.

Eugenics promoters such as Wiggam intended to speed up social change, which they imagined to be inevitable. In effect, they sought to accelerate the selection of the best, while leaving the social status quo basically untouched. Nothing makes this more obvious than a look at the gender relationships that Wiggam postulated: All the values and emotions he cited in a positive way had traditionally male connotations. Wiggam’s ideal of economic, political, or intellectual leaders were exclusively Nordic males, whose superiority over women and seemingly effeminate immigrant males was clearly marked by the body-images he used⁴⁵. While also useful for and adept at supporting their husbands, Nordic women were to per-

⁴² Ibid. 162; *Heinze*, *Schizophrenia Americana* 231–233.

⁴³ *Wiggam*, *The Next Age of Man* 236. Elsewhere he wrote that the higher classes of society were biologically different from the lower classes, see *ibid.* 272.

⁴⁴ Ibid. 140. This idea was also central to legitimize the military segregation of blacks in the U.S. Army prior to the Korean War, *Christine Knauer*, “If We Must Die, Let Us Die as Free Men Not Jim Crow Slaves!” The African American Community, Military Service, War, and the Black Soldier in Postwar America (PhD thesis, Tübingen 2009).

⁴⁵ On male body images in the 1920s see *Nies*, *Eugenic Fantasies* 1944.

ceive their highest contribution to society (and thus their greatest happiness) in giving birth to and raising “well-born”, healthy children⁴⁶. Through the use of such slogans, Wiggam appealed to the attitudes of many males still influenced by Victorian morality. The pressures for success faced by such men, along with the perceived increase in competition from women and immigrants, were shaking their confidence in their social status and in the security of their position as the family’s breadwinner and legitimate head⁴⁷.

Wiggam endeavored to make his praise of eugenics not look like a break with traditional ideas of happiness and morality. An undated leaflet – which he probably distributed during public evening lectures and in which he praised himself in the common semantics of the time as the “Apostle of Efficiency” – insisted “Mr. Wiggam Does *Not* Lecture on Sex-Hygiene”. Such disclaimers recognized that much of his audience came from a traditionalist-religious background. The leaflet explained that eugenics was related to sexual hygiene, but that it had more in common with issues such as factory legislation, the currency, and immigration policy⁴⁸. Wiggam also rebutted accusations that he saw human reproduction as a merely technical problem. Quite the opposite was true, he insisted. Applied eugenics was *the* means for a happy, romantic, heterosexual relationship: “Eugenics Does Not Take The Romance Out Of Love. It Keeps The Romance Forever In Love.” For this claim – and for numerous others – the brief leaflet provided no evidence at all. In his 1924 book, *The Fruit of the Family Tree*, however, Wiggam elaborated on this line of reasoning by asking the rhetorical question: “Can anything more completely blast the romance out of love than defective, neurotic and uncontrollable children?”⁴⁹

For Wiggam, and for other promoters of eugenics, both traditional values in matters of sexuality and family and religious reference points were essential elements of their argumentation. In his first book, *The New Decalogue of Science*, published in 1922⁵⁰, Wiggam called the program of eugenics a “new social and political Bible”. He and other eugenicist publicists regularly quoted passages from the Bible as evidence for the ancient character of eugenic thought, and by implication the divine origins of it. Also, Wiggam claimed, birth control according to eugenic criteria had always been a predominant goal of religion⁵¹. From his point of view eugenics, as an attempt to guide human evolution was itself a kind of new religion. At the least it would mean the “completed Christianizing of mankind”⁵².

⁴⁶ Wiggam, *The Next Age of Man* 256.

⁴⁷ Michael Kimmel, *Manhood in America. A Cultural History* (New York 1996) 195–205.

⁴⁸ Wiggam, “The Apostle of Efficiency” 5; Wiggam, *The Fruit of the Family Tree* 296–297.

⁴⁹ Ibid. 6. In his rhetoric at least, Wiggam reflected the continuing influence of the “radical social purity movement” of the pre-World War I years. Catherine Cocks, *Rethinking Sexuality in the Progressive Era*, in: *Journal of the Gilded Age and Progressive Era* 5/2 (2006) 93–118, quotation 103.

⁵⁰ Quoted in Rosen, *Preaching Eugenics* 129.

⁵¹ Wiggam, *The Next Age of Man* 356.

⁵² Ibid. 398–399; Rosen, *Preaching Eugenics* 129.

The fact that Christianity was employed by eugenicists to legitimate their program is illustrated by the medal the American Eugenics Society gave to winners of Fitter Family competitions. The medal depicts a baby being given a burning torch by its parents who wear ancient robes – a symbol for passing on extraordinary genes. On another version, seeds in a carafe are passed on to the child. Above both images, a verse from the King James Bible version of the 16th Psalm appears: “Yea, I Have a Goodly Heritage.” The New American Standard Bible underscores the eugenicists’ misappropriation of this phrase – which refers to divine and not genetic inheritance – by rendering it: “Indeed, my heritage is beautiful to me.”⁵³

Many leading clergymen supported eugenics, as demonstrated by Christine Rosen in her study *Preaching Eugenics*. Leaders of liberal wings of various Protestant denominations were susceptible to eugenics arguments, which seemed to conform to their agenda of a socially relevant church open to new intellectual and scientific developments. Conventional religious leaders had only minimal interest in the details of genetics; however they saw their cooperation with eugenicists as way to enhance their own social relevance through cooperation with “scientific research”. A pronouncement by Rev. Kenneth C. MacArthur of the Federal Church in Sterling, Massachusetts, was typical: “Eugenics offers great assistance in this effort to establish a race of people who approximate the Christian ideal.”⁵⁴ Likewise in Germany, the elites of the major churches and political parties were open towards eugenic and race-hygiene ideology⁵⁵. On both sides of the Atlantic Ocean, eugenics represented a mixture of modern social technology and a regenerated, modernized Christianity. This combination made eugenics attractive to religious people.

The acceptance of eugenics thought by many American Christians was due in part to a popular interpretation of Jesus Christ that gained influence during the second half of the nineteenth century and which eventually became known as “muscular Christianity”. This perspective questioned the traditional image of Christ as the Lamb of God who turned the other cheek to his tormentors and who accepted his own execution without resistance. This image of a Son of God who submitted meekly to suffering was increasingly replaced by a new interpretation which imagined Jesus as decidedly masculine, physically and mentally strong⁵⁶.

⁵³ For images of the medals: <http://www.eugenicsarchive.org/html/eugenics/static/images/1564.html> (accessed March 31, 2009). See also *Rosen*, *Preaching Eugenics* 114. For the various English versions of the 6th line of Psalm 16 see Parallel Bible, <http://bible.cc/psalms/16-6.htm> (accessed March 31, 2009).

⁵⁴ Quoted in *Rosen*, *Preaching Eugenics* 126. On the links between “religious perfectionism” and eugenics thought in the nineteenth century, *Ronald G. Walters*, *Primers for Prudery. Sexual Advice to Victorian America* (Baltimore 2000) 143–159.

⁵⁵ See *Ingrid Richter*, *Katholizismus und Eugenik in der Weimarer Republik und im Dritten Reich. Zwischen Sittlichkeitsreform und Rassenhygiene* (Paderborn 2001); *Michael Schwartz*, *Sozialistische Eugenik. Eugenische Sozialtechnologien in Debatten und Politik der deutschen Sozialdemokratie 1890–1933* (Bonn 1995).

⁵⁶ See *Clifford Puttney*, *Muscular Christianity. Manhood and Sports in Protestant America, 1880–1920* (Cambridge, Mass. 2003).

By the 1920s, this assertive, manly Christ acquired virtues highly appreciated during the interwar period: “leadership skills”. Emblematic of this new emphasis was Bruce Barton’s book *The Man Nobody Knows*, which will be analyzed in the third section of this essay. In its own way, Barton’s book also exemplified the “worship of life” mentality that intrigued and worried Huizinga.

Bruce Barton’s Case for Christianity Free of Suffering or Transcendence

The Man Nobody Knows was the book hit of the years 1925 and 1926. Bruce Barton, an influential advertising expert and political adviser, offered his new interpretation of Biblical Jesus: In the first place, he had not been – as depicted in theological tradition – a figure who suffered, who was persecuted and tortured, but a physically strong, hardened, and attractive young man, an early advertising genius and a successful recruiter and leader of men. As Barton wrote: “Jesus pushed a plane and swung an adze; he was a successful carpenter. He slept outdoors and spent his days walking around his favourite lake ... The vigorous activities of his days gave his nerves the strength of steel ... [Later] he was the most popular dinner guest in Jerusalem.”⁵⁷

Barton, a kind of modernist evangelist, recounted the life of this Jesus in seven short chapters. He wrote simple, accessible prose, using clear arguments and avoiding theological controversies. In this book, Barton displayed no interest in metaphysical speculation. According to him, the success story of Christianity – a kind of global human-service enterprise – was primarily due to Jesus’s advertising and public relations skills. Barton turned Jesus into a sort of founding figure of modern capitalism, even entitling a chapter “The Founder of Modern Business”. As the author saw it, Jesus’s primary achievement was not so much a better product, which is to say a superior theology or religious doctrine, but his success in entering and operating in the highly competitive religious market, thanks especially to innovative advertisement: “Assuredly, there was no demand for a new religion; the world was already oversupplied.”⁵⁸ Elsewhere in the book, Barton makes Jesus a fighter for democracy and equal rights, maybe even an early prophet of the American independence movement: “He called upon men to throw away fear ... and claim the Lord of Creation as Father. It is the basis of all revolt, all democracy ... No wonder the authorities trembled.”⁵⁹ In the 1920s, Barton was by no means the only one who sought to enable Americans to relate better to Jesus as someone

⁵⁷ Bruce Barton, *The Man Nobody Knows*, intro. Richard M. Fried (Chicago 2000) 4. The book was fourth among American bestsellers in 1925 and first in 1926. Richard M. Fried, *The Man Everybody Knew. Bruce Barton and the Making of Modern America* (Chicago 2005) 101.

⁵⁸ Barton, *The Man Nobody Knows* 45.

⁵⁹ Ibid. 47.

who enjoyed life and knew how to live in the world⁶⁰. Some Protestant churches sought to gain attention by proclaiming themselves as “The House of Happiness”. Others resorted to slogans such as “Christianity Makes People Healthy, Happy and Prosperous” – a perspective that overlapped with that of the eugenicists⁶¹. As Richard M. Fried notes in his biography of Barton, the publicist was particularly interested in showing how religious belief could be reconciled with modern times. The son of a Protestant minister who had published his own writings aimed at popular audiences, though more traditional in style and content, Barton sought neither to abandon nor surpass Protestant Christianity. Instead, he wanted gradually to change it to make it compatible with the demands of a modern, capitalist consumer society⁶². If this adaptation succeeded, he argued, religion would be able to regain its traditional task of creating meaning and order⁶³.

The time for a popular book on religion and modernity was well chosen. Barton clearly drew upon familiar themes in contemporary American culture in his version of the widespread effort to reconcile religion and modernity⁶⁴. By way of comparison, *völkisch* movements within German Protestantism propagated an Aryan Christianity that shared some features with Barton’s muscular Jesus or with pro-eugenicist lines in American Protestantism but that absorbed German nationalist attitudes as well. By the 1890s, for example, the Lutheran minister and author Arthur Bonus demanded nothing less than a Germanization of Christianity⁶⁵. To some extent, then, national-religious strands in German, British, or American Protestantism almost certainly were a feature of trans-Atlantic religious history⁶⁶.

⁶⁰ The cinema also turned Jesus into an entertainment icon, with movies about him made from both liberal-progressive and conservative-fundamentalist perspectives. See *Richard Wightman Fox, Jesus in America. Personal Savior, Cultural Hero, National Obsession* (San Francisco 2005) 307–318.

⁶¹ Quoted in *R. Laurence Moore, Touchdown Jesus. The Mixing of Sacred and Secular in American History* (Louisville 2003) 64.

⁶² William E. Barton’s books included *Jesus of Nazareth. His Life and the Scenes of His Ministry* (1903); Bruce Barton devoted himself to the popularization of religion in numerous writings, including *A Young Man’s Jesus* (1914) and *The Book Nobody Knows* (1926), a successful follow-up to his 1925 bestseller. *Fox, Jesus in America* 318.

⁶³ *Fried, The Man Everybody Knew* 84–85. For a contrasting argument, *Coben, Rebellion against Victorianism* 26–27.

⁶⁴ See, for example, the essay by *Michael Hochgeschwender* in this volume.

⁶⁵ *Arthur Bonus, Von Stöcker zu Naumann. Ein Wort zur Germanisierung des Christentums* (Heilbronn 1896); *Rainer Lächele, Protestantismus und völkische Religion im deutschen Kaiserreich*, in: *Uwe Puschner, Walter Schmitz, Justus H. Ulbricht* (eds.), *Handbuch zur “Völkischen Bewegung” 1871–1918* (München 1999) 149–163; *Uwe Puschner, Weltanschauung und Religion – Religion und Weltanschauung. Ideologie und Formen völkischer Religion*, in: *Zeitenblicke* 5/1 (2006), <http://www.zeitenblicke.de/2006/1/Puschner> (accessed: Aug. 5, 2008).

⁶⁶ On the effort to build a trans-Atlantic history of religion, *Hartmut Lehman* (ed.), *Transatlantische Religionsgeschichte. 18.–20. Jahrhundert* (Göttingen 2006). For case studies, *Thomas Hahn-Bruckart, Friedrich von Schlömbach. Erweckungsprediger zwischen Deutschland und Amerika. Interkulturalität und Transkonfessionalität im 19. Jahrhundert*

Also contributing to the success of Barton's book was the fact that he turned Jesus's life into an analogy for the experiences and desires of many of his readers. Jesus, Burton wrote, came from a small, obscure place on the country, where already at an early age he did hard physical labor and was increasingly burdened by his father with responsibilities for the family enterprise, a carpenter's workshop⁶⁷. Jesus, however, had greater ambitions and finally went to the capital, where he sought to implement his religious (or rather business) vision and become powerful and influential. The parallel to the experience of urbanization in the United States between 1890 and 1940 leaps out. Barton himself, along with many of his readers, grew up in small towns and moved to the cities as young adults, where they sought professional success and a better life. Basically, the book offers the venerable American dream in a new religious guise. It adapts the gospels for the developing consumer society. It justifies modern American values by reference to religion, while at the same time contributing to the period's "deification of businessmen"⁶⁸.

From the perspective of the history of emotions, Barton's interpretation of Jesus illustrates in an almost-paradigmatic way the "emotionological change" postulated by Stearns. "Victorian" emotions such as guilt, grief, and romantic-irrational love, all of which had hitherto seemed essential for an understanding of the New Testament, gave way in Barton's account to the new "emotional setting" of cool rationality and control of emotional states⁶⁹. Barton's Jesus had "nerves of steel". He was masterful in tense critical situations, "one of the finest examples of self-control in all human history"⁷⁰.

It is a commonplace of the iconographic analysis of religion that visual images of Jesus mirror hegemonic ideals of beauty in different periods⁷¹. Against this background, Barton's descriptions are telling. When recounting the story of the sick man at the pool of Bethesda (from chapter 5 of the Saint John's Gospel), the sufferer looked up and saw "the calm assurance of those blue eyes, the supple strength of those muscles, the ruddy skin that testified to the rich red blood beneath" – and, as Barton adds, "the healing occurred"⁷². A few lines later, Barton describes the encounter of his Nordic-Aryan Jesus with Pontius Pilate: "In the face of the Roman were deep unpleasant lines; his cheeks were fatty with self-indulgence; he had the colorless look of the indoor living. The straight young man stood inches above him, bronzed and hard, and clean as the air of his loved mountain and lake."⁷³ At a Fitter Family competition, this Jesus, a kind of Aryan Greek

(Göttingen 2011); *Wolfhart Penter*, Sozialprotestantismus in den USA und Deutschland. Social Gospel und christlich soziale Bewegung bis 1914 (München 2005).

⁶⁷ See *Barton*, *The Man Nobody Knows* 22.

⁶⁸ See *Leuchtenburg*, *The Perils of Prosperity* 188–189.

⁶⁹ See *Stearns*, *American Cool* 139–182.

⁷⁰ *Barton*, *The Man Nobody Knows* 28.

⁷¹ See *Morgan*, *Protestants and Pictures* 265–304.

⁷² *Barton*, *The Man Nobody Knows* 24.

⁷³ *Ibid.* 29.

à la Leni Riefenstahl, would have probably have received a Grade A, whereas Pilate, the Roman, conformed to negative images widespread among the American middle classes of Southern European immigrants to their country: an unrestrained type, a parasite formed by city life and suited only to it, a burden upon hard-working rural and small-town Americans⁷⁴. That Barton's Jesus might also have been useful as an advertising icon for the American Eugenics Society provides further indication of the popularity of eugenic thought and symbolism among American Protestants during the 1920s.

Even eighty years after its initial publication, Barton's book still wins support from many religious Americans. At least one has that impression when reading comments on the current edition of the book at Amazon.com. Only a few consider Barton's interpretation a "bizarre anachronism ... something just short of obscene" or regard it as merely an historical source; the majority of readers seem uncritically enthusiastic. For example, a reviewer from Utah writes: "The Man Nobody Knows is a wonderful tool for examining Christ's life as a smiling, divine businessman. As the wheel of big business turns and men spend their lives striving to make millions of dollars, Barton reminds us of one businessman who gave his life in comforting millions of souls." Another reviewer remarks, again without any trace of irony: "One of the greatest falsehoods about the message of Jesus has been exposed ... Revealing the 'Jesus Business Plan', Barton points out that to be successful in business, love, and life ... One must be a SERVANT. Ford 'served' us with transportation, Edison with light, Bell with communication, Disney with fantasy. Choose what you want to 'receive' and then GIVE IT AWAY. A lesson for the ages."⁷⁵

Conclusion

Both Wiggam's popularizations of eugenics and Barton's updating of Jesus offer paradigms of the new emotional style emerging in the United States in the early twentieth century. Such images propagated notions of vitality and individual happiness as essential material and spiritual values. Both authors emphasized physical strength, control of emotional states and cool rationality, all of which they perceived as to some degree products of heredity. While Susman and Stearns characterized this new, highly masculine emotional style in their own ways, Huizinga was perceptive in describing it as the "worship of life". The Dutch scholars' term underscores the phenomenon's essential "emotionological" feature: the radical

⁷⁴ On this contrast between imagery of Nordic, old-stock Americans and decadent, undisciplined southern Europeans, *Nies*, *Eugenic Fantasies* 28–39.

⁷⁵ See customer reviews of *Bruce Barton*, *The Man Nobody Knows*, http://www.amazon.com/Man-Nobody-Knows-Bruce-Barton/product-reviews/1566632943/ref=cm_cr_dp_all_summary?ie=UTF8&showViewpoints=1&sortBy=bySubmissionDateDescending (accessed Mar. 20, 2009).

orientation towards this world commonplace in popular religious writings of the era. In contrast to the apocalyptic scenarios hitherto presented by eugenicists, Wiggam and Barton in their different ways glorified the traditional American social order as a sort of heaven on earth. Even if elements of this style were present earlier, the “worship of life” exemplified a modern idea of the self that became conventional in the United States between 1890 and 1940. While this development was contradictory in many respects, it reveals a specifically American confluence of science and religion, of progressive-liberal attitudes and traditionalist, paternalist-hierarchical views. It was modern precisely because of its contradictions, an American episode in the transnational history of modern identity and emotion in the first half of the twentieth century.

Summary

Dieser Aufsatz untersucht, in welcher Weise sich in den USA zwischen 1890 und 1940 das hegemoniale Verständnis des Selbst veränderte. Er schließt damit an Überlegungen von Warren I. Susman sowie von Carol und Peter Stearns an, die für diese Zeit einen Wandel vom viktorianischen Konzept des Charakters hin zu einem modernen Verständnis von Personalität postulieren. Ihnen zufolge sei die zumindest als Ideal bis zum späten 19. Jahrhundert vorherrschende „morality of self-denial“ in den ersten Jahrzehnten des 20. Jahrhunderts von einer „morality of self-fulfillment“ abgelöst worden. Der niederländische Kulturhistoriker Johan Huizinga sprach schon 1935 von einem „wahren Kult des Lebens“, der die amerikanische Moderne kennzeichne. Anhand einer Analyse von auf den ersten Blick so disparaten Quellen wie der Berichterstattung über einen seinerzeit sensationellen Mordprozess, der Rhetorik eines populären Vortragsreisenden in Sachen Eugenik sowie von Bruce Bartons Erfolgsbuch „The Man Nobody knows“, einer Adaptation des neutestamentarischen Evangeliums für die kapitalistische Moderne, wird an konkreten Beispielen gezeigt, wie durchgreifend dieser emotiologische Wandel war. Zugleich verdeutlicht dieser Aufsatz, dass die skizzierten Veränderungen nicht nur als Bruch mit älteren Traditionen anzusehen sind, sondern in vielerlei Hinsicht eine radikale Zuspitzung dessen bedeuteten, was die soziale Ordnung in den USA schon im 19. Jahrhundert zusammengehalten hatte. Physische Stärke und kühle Rationalität, die zur Befriedigung des eigenen Anspruchs auf Glück eingesetzt werden konnten und sollten, waren zentrale Elemente eines Individualitätsentwurfs, der gerade in seiner Widersprüchlichkeit ein hervorstechendes Element der US-amerikanischen „fractured modernity“ war.