

Are We a Respectful People?

As each new nation steps out upon the fields of the political and social world, it must face the criticism and censure of those who have established their places in the rank of nations. Our country has not been an exception and looking at us from the standpoint of foreign nations and people, we doubtless deserve many of the severe attacks made on our manners and customs or more properly - lack of manners and customs. It is to a question growing out of this, that I wish to call your attention - Are We a Respectful People?

The commonly implied meaning of this phrase is - Have we, as a people, the respect due them for our government for those who are our representations in it and for other nations?

At first thought it might be supposed that a comparison with those nations against which no such charge is made, would place us in the proper light, but a careful study of our position and theirs proves this to be entirely impracticable. Such a comparison shows to us rather why we as Americans are charged with lack of respect, than establishes the truth or the falsity of the charge. To see ourselves as others see us would not only throw us in the light of prejudice, but place us upon a far different basis than that upon which we stand.

The fundamental principles of our government differ

from those of nearly every other, giving us few parallel lines along which to judge in the political history. Our entire social system lies on a different plane and has in view a broader purpose, embracing not a few chosen ones of rank, title or position, but the whole body of American people.

With such conditions in mind, it is evident that what might be considered an act of respect with us, would not be regarded as such by others.

An example will show the chasm which exists between the ruler and subject in the political life of other countries, and the common highway which all must tread in our own land. The monarch on his throne, sees his subject before him, on bended knee or prostrate on the earth, - the attitude of what to him is respect, though all this seeming humility may be but the result of training, or, because of fear and unreason it may be the most loyal subject or the most rebellious one. The attitude may reveal either or neither. Such a scene we never witness; and in the light of American civilization, such an act would be regarded as mockery, - heartless formality. Our chief magistrate meets his fellow citizens with the same marks of deference and respect, that he expects of them in return. With many nations respect may be gained through fear, but with us it never is. While such conditions exist we hold that they, as nations, have as little right to accuse us of lack of respect, as would now to face them with the same accusation.

We are told that we have not proper respect for and confidence in those who occupy positions of trust and responsibility. Now again there is need to look at us and judge us from our own standpoint. The individual and his position bear a peculiar relationship to each other. The individual is the unit of government, and while we recognize that one person may be superior to another as to the position he has acquired yet before the law, all stand on an equal footing - that of justice. Rank, birth, and title are alike considered unworthy of notice. We care not who one's father is, or grandfather and great grandfather were - but the one important thing is, who is he, and what has he made of himself.

Since men are elected to fill offices, not offices created for the convenience of men, the brainless man who demands respect in many countries, simply by virtue of his position has no chance to exercise his unjust rule. Nature's gift to man of a reasonable amount of intelligence, capable of cultivation and a strong physical body form the only true basis upon which to build.

Ours is a representative government made up of just such individuals. Before his election to any office of responsibility and trust the candidate must be able to stand the most stringent scrutiny. His name and reputation are for the time being public property and through the medium of a free press the people whom he is to serve are given the history of his whole life and character and on his own

merit or demerit each candidate must stand or fall. Such a man in the public service is not only worthy of respect, but from the very nature of the case commands it.

From the position of the obnoxious a popular error arises from the synonymous use of the words disrespect and criticism, and often the former is used when it should carry with it the meaning of the latter. With us the words respect and criticism are not words in opposition but the former is strengthened by the reasonable use of the latter.

Our respect for other nations cannot be more correctly measured than by that respect which is meted out to us in return. While we bow before no superior power and ask no country to humble itself before us, yet since we first became an independent nation we have commanded the respect of every civilized country and our friendly coöperation in international affairs has been courted by all foreign powers. Not only by our attitude have we gained respect but our works have manifested themselves. — Our productions in certain lines form a part of the necessary food of the people of other countries many of our skilled workmen are able to compete successfully with their foreign brother workman. The recognition of prominent educators of this country and the adoption of our methods are of themselves evidences of respect. Our researches in science are added to those of the older and universally recognized schools. To our superior intelligence as individuals is already attributed our success as a nation, while our

government stands out distinctly as the best existing form of National government.

Our almost utter disregard for precedent in customs is by many considered a mark of disrespect. Probably no other country has so few established customs either national, social, or religious. But there are many reasons why this is the case. It was the old customs and exactions which were so unbearable to our forefathers and which drove them to seek a refuge in this country: The idea of form and ceremony is foreign to our principles of government and in a government such as ours political controversy is apt to take a prominent part in any national demonstration. Yet we are not wholly without our holidays and in the form of national gatherings - Once a year we rejoice in the blessing of a free country, Once each year we pay our respects to those who died for the freedom of humanity, Once in each year we as a nation give thanks to the God who has so prospered us and each returning year we celebrate the birth of his Son the Saviour of the world.

The most unjust of all the phrases of this question is that which tells us we do not respect our own government. If this be true why do we glory in the name of American?

We look upon our nation, not with jealousy and envy for those who are at its head, but with true pride and thankful hearts. Yet while we are a grateful people we do not think we have reached the top most round. We are

not a stationary people. With time comes change, the great ruler of this nation and it is the constant change in our social and political life, which calls for so much censure from the observer, yet to it we owe our very existence as a free country. While true respect with us means respect for the laws of the land, it also implies a correction of existing evils and with the people lies the responsibility.

Revolution in its widest sense, to us indicates the growth of the people and a corresponding lack of growth in government. Reforms of both a social and political nature are but signs of a correction of some misapprehension. It is just such characteristics which makes up that part of a nation's history known as its individuality. It is established by necessity and retained in that or another form as the necessity and wants of the people require.

There is yet but one test to be applied, if we will stand this, the decision of those who have answered in the negative the question - Are We a Respectful People? must be reversed.

Lack of true respect is an indication of the abuse of patriotism. Are we a patriotic people? Pause for a moment and read three pages from our nation's history.

On the first read of that band of patriots who in a new country wrenched from the hands of tyranny this land which we call home and gave it to us as our inheritance. Read from the record the story our fathers tell, of how the deepest stain that ever marked

The pages of a nations history was washed from our own
fair record by the flow of that crimson stream fed by the
lives of her countrymen. One more page read - not of
war but of peace, of prosperity and plenty, of yet
brighter prospects for the future - then, answer for yourself
the question - Are We a Respectful People?

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