

Americanization Day

By Theodore Roosevelt

IT is proposed to turn the Fourth of July celebration this year into something of practical betterment for the country by making it the occasion of a resolute and intelligent effort to bring into contact with one another masses of our native-born citizens and masses of those who have come to us from abroad intending to become citizens.

The proposal is to make the Fourth of July this year an Americanization Day, when racial barriers and prejudices are swept aside, when differences of education, language, ancestry, occupation are forgotten, and the American citizen who is born such celebrates the day in honor of the naturalized citizen—primarily with a view to making him absolutely and without reservation an American. The committees that have had this matter in charge have been working through "The Immigrants in America Review." In its poster it sets out that Uncle Sam's problem is to take the thirteen million immigrants in the United States and offer them real and not nominal citizenship, to teach them to become Americans and nothing else but Americans, and to make them feel at home here in the United States and able to profit in full from the advantages our country offers—in sum, to make them feel that they are self-respecting citizens of our nation, with their interests and their affections deeply rooted in our soil. To do this it is necessary to give them national consciousness. They must feel that they are Americans among Americans; that they are part of America and have a share in and a duty toward American institutions.

The cities of Philadelphia, Cleveland, Baltimore and Los Angeles, originally under the leadership of Cleveland, have organized Citizens Receptions or New Voters Days as final steps in the naturalization of foreign-born aliens. It has been found that peculiar significance can be given these Citizenship Receptions, which are primarily designed to give dignity to the ceremony of admission to citizenship, if they take place on the Fourth of July. It is earnestly to be desired that they shall become national in scope. A committee under the name of "National Americanization Day Committee" has already been formed with this purpose in view. The old type of flamboyant Fourth of July speech gradually grew to imply something really discreditable in the way of insincerity and buncombe. This is inevitable where words are freely used without any real purpose and ability to relate them to facts (whether in speeches, arbitration treaties, or peace conventions, by the way). The proposal now is to substitute, for speeches which mean nothing, action toward a definite end, action which shall represent practical effort toward the achievement of realizable ideals.

THE dreadful world-war now waging, with its threat of involving us, and with the very unhealthy upgrowth during the past ten months of an aggressive hyphenated Americanism (hand in hand with an ignoble peace-at-any-price-ism) in our own country, has emphasized the need that we of this nation shall become wholly united. There should be no more hyphenated Americans; neither native-Americans nor foreign-Americans. Each American of foreign birth or origin who sincerely desires to become a good citizen should show his good citizenship by being wholly and without reserve, and without divided allegiance, and with emphatic repudiation of the entire principle of "dual nationality," an American citizen and nothing else. If in good faith and with a single heart he becomes such an American citizen, it should be clearly understood that it is infamous, that it is treachery to our institutions, to make any discrimination against him because he was born abroad or because of the creed which he professes or fails to profess. The obligation is mutual and reciprocal.

Having this in view, we should make our Fourth of July speeches and exercises the beginning of a constructive program. It is a good thing to salute the flag and to give citizenship buttons. It is a better thing clearly to keep in mind the needs of America; and to strive efficiently to meet the needs of the foreign-born American citizen, in order the better to meet the needs of our common country, in which his children and our children are to dwell side by side, and ultimately to see their blood fused and all alike adopt the same ideals.

It has been suggested that the public schools should be used in connection with these celebrations. In them on the evening before the Fourth the American-born, and the foreign-born who intend to become Americans, should be encouraged to meet, so that each shall see and know the others as fellow-citizens. District groups would thus be gathered in the various public schools and patriotic exercises should be held; and the school children, who are themselves, no matter what their parentage, in the overwhelming majority of cases native-born, can best bring the two groups together and make them realize their community

of fundamental interest in American citizenship. This will give the individual contact which is the necessary preliminary to that group contact which is in itself a step toward doing away with the groups.

Then, on the day following, the Fourth of July itself, there can be a general gathering where the people will meet less intimately, but where they can all take part in expressing with fervor and in no perfunctory manner their loyalty to America.

THE addresses themselves should mark the beginning of work for certain definite objects. Among these are:

1. The hastening of the speaking of English. Every public school, every business or philanthropic agency, should be employed for this purpose. There should be a multiplication of facilities for this purpose in schools, in lessons, in pay envelopes. There should be advancement of wages and promotion for workmen who speak English. There can be no objection to, on the contrary in many cases good will come from, preserving other languages, and above all by spreading among all our people the best old-country traditions and customs—the German "gemütlichkeit," for instance. But the first duty of our citizens is to develop their own American traditions and customs; and English is the master key to American opportunity and the primal sign of citizenship. In time of peace our people need this common language for safety and social success, for the sake of proper performance of all the duties of citizenship, and for the proper taking advantage of industrial opportunities. In time of war it is essential as a sign of national solidarity.

2. Illiteracy should be reduced. Every immigrant under forty-four should learn to read and write, whether in school or by correspondence courses. Every American citizen should read at least one American newspaper written in the language of his fellow-countrymen. The man born abroad will naturally and properly read a newspaper written in the language of his birthplace; but he should also learn to read another newspaper, one written in the language which is the language of his adopted country, which will probably be the sole language of his sons, and certainly the sole language of his grandsons.

3. There should be a change in the naturalization ceremony. It should mean something. The standard should be raised, and yet the process simplified and the sessions adapted to the needs of the workman. He should be put to less cost of money and less waste of time; and on the other hand he should be required to take part in it as a dignified procedure and to show that he has a feeling of loyalty and understanding as a coming citizen. The woman, in my judgment, should be required herself to become a citizen, not to become one merely by marrying a man who is one. She should be taught what American citizenship means in rights, in protection to her when she works and as a wife and a mother, and in protection to her children. American-born women should seek out their incoming sisters, to carry to them the best that there is in America, in the standards of living, in care of children, in the self-respecting performing of duty by man and wife alike in the home. Our educational institutions should work hand-in-hand with the court in all these matters.

4. People cannot teach what they do not themselves know. They cannot give what they do not themselves possess. The realization by American-born men and women of their duty to the immigrant would inevitably force them to a realization of their own duties and make them ashamed to come short therein. The man or woman who shirks duty, the wife or husband who shirks the performance of duty to children, and above all who shirks having children, had best keep away from the immigrants, because he or she is merely a noxious feature in American life. The man or woman who speaks of foreign-born citizens with habitual contempt or hostility, using offensive nicknames about them, is doing all that can be done to perpetuate hyphenated Americanism in its worst form. Let the decent, self-respecting, duty-performing American man and American woman show their real and hearty fellow-feeling with, and respect for, the immigrant by trying to help that immigrant to a loftier patriotism and to the practical application of such patriotism in the every-day life of the home and the neighborhood, the state and the nation. Let the United States mean to the immigrant something more than digging ditches, running machines or keeping boarders. Let the Fourth of July be accepted as a day when a real beginning is made to secure equality before the law and equality in industrial opportunity for native-born and foreign-born alike. Let us abolish the padrone, abolish the last vestige of

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peonage, and everything that tends toward the slavery of workingmen and discrimination against immigrants. Do not let the immigrant come here who ought not to come; but if he is allowed to come, treat him exactly as anyone else is treated. Let us make the Fourth of July an invitation to all residents in America, foreign-born and native-born alike, to become real citizens of the country and to realize that we are not many peoples but one nation. Then let us make it by law a national holiday; for there can be no better national holiday than one consecrated to making all dwellers within our boundaries desire to become citizens, and to emphasizing the things that unite them with, and not those that divide them from; their fellows. In short, the proposal is that on this Fourth of July we shall inaugurate the practise of establishing, on what has become by custom our great national holiday, an American contact with every immigrant in America, a contact which shall bring personal relationship, institutional opportunity, industrial fellowship; a contact which, having been begun, shall then be persevered in.

Surely this is a project which should commend itself heartily to all our people who seriously appreciate the problems before us as a nation. The events of the last few months have brought vividly home to all of us the extreme danger to this country of permitting the upgrowth here of any system of group citizenship. The hyphenated American is a danger to the country. This is true whether he call himself English-American or French-American, German-American or Irish-American; *and it is well to remember that it is also true if in a narrow spirit of intolerant exclusiveness he call himself native-American.* Americanization is a matter of spirit and soul, not a matter of a man's physical birthplace or his national origin or his creed.

When I was Police Commissioner of New York, I was thrown into intimate contact with many good Americans, with many good citizens of the great city. On the whole it seemed to me that of the men with whom I was thus thrown into contact, the two

best and most useful Americans were Jacob Riis, who was born in Denmark and who throughout his life was one of the most potent influences in this country for the highest kind of American nationalism and good citizenship, and Arthur von Briesen, who was born in Germany, who had fought in our Civil War, and who in founding the Legal Aid Society had met in efficient manner one of the most crying needs of the day, the need of making the law the true handmaid of Justice; the need of making the law an aid instead of merely a menace to those who stand most in need of the law's assistance. No men whose ancestors came over on the Mayflower could have possibly rendered better service to the cause of genuine Americanism than these two men were then rendering. Under me at the time there were working in the department men whose forefathers for generations had been born in the United States and men whose forefathers had come over from Ireland. Some of these were good men and some of these were bad men; the former I am happy to say outnumbering the latter. But any line of division drawn between the good and the bad, the efficient and the inefficient, would have run at right angles to the line of cleavage between those whose fathers were of foreign and those whose fathers were of native-American stock. In the same way there were under me men who were Protestants, men who were Catholics, men who were Jews; and an exactly parallel statement would have to be made by any man who conscientiously strove to sort out from among them those who were and those who were not good public servants.

This country is a crucible, a melting-pot, in which many different race-strains are being fused into one. The true test of the worth of such a melting-pot is the completeness of the fusion. If some of the material remains as an unfused lump, it is worthless in itself, and it is also a detriment to the rest of the mixture. In other words, nothing but damage comes both to themselves, and to all of us as a whole, from any group of immigrants remaining distinct as a group;

and nothing but damage comes from the action of any group of native Americans who seek to discriminate against good Americans who were born abroad or who profess a different creed, simply because they thus have a different birthplace or thus worship their Creator in a different manner.

In short words, it is an outrage for any citizens of this country to act as German-Americans, English-Americans or Irish-Americans, or in any way to use their citizenship, excepting each as a plain American citizen no more and no less, whose prime concern is the honor and the interest of America and whose desire is to see the United States behave with equal justice toward all the other nations and peoples of mankind; and it is no less an outrage to discriminate for or against a man because of the national origin of himself or his forebears, or because he is or is not a Catholic or a Protestant, a Jew or a Gentile.

OFTEN good citizens of foreign birth are puzzled by the term "hyphenated Americanism," being uneasy lest it be applied to them as a term of offense because they are not native born. It should be clearly understood that it is just as offensive, just as un-American, to ascribe "hyphenated Americanism" to a good American who was born abroad as it is for an American born abroad himself to use the term in such manner as to show that his interests are not at one with those of all other American citizens. It is offensive and mischievous for any native-born American to speak of a first-class American citizen who happens to have been born in Ireland or Germany as a "German-American" or an "Irish-American." If the newcomer is a good American he is entitled to be spoken of as such and as nothing else, and he is entitled to exactly the same respect as if descended from any Mayflower Pilgrim or Hudson River patroon or Virginia settler on the banks of the James. Native-Americanism is itself merely a species of hyphenated Americanism. Insistence upon it merely weakens us when we denounce, as we are in honor bound to denounce, every species of foreign-Americanism. The very fact that we must decline to allow the principle of dual nationality in our life, that we must insist that the German-American or Irish-American is false to America if he tries to shape American policy in the interest of or against the interest of any foreign country, because of his own blood-connection with that foreign country, must make us no less insistent that if he in good faith does his duty as an American citizen he shall be put on an exact equality with every native-born American.

Any one of us who has ever commanded American troops in battle has commanded men who were born abroad, men of native birth whose parents were born abroad, and men of old revolutionary stock; and such commander has been no true American if he failed to treat all these men alike on a common basis, and to judge them solely by the test of their patriotism and soldierly efficiency. He must insist that all alike occupy exactly the same position of unflinching and single-minded loyalty to the American flag, and of complete severance of recognition of or loyalty to any foreign power whatsoever; and in return he must not only in act but in feeling put all who so behave on a plane of absolute equality of treatment according to conduct, foreign-born and native-born, Catholic, Prot-

estant and Jew, standing on an exact level. What is thus true of military life is no less true of civil life.

THE men who stand for insistence upon complete Americanization of the foreign-born citizen in our country must remember that duty and right should always go hand in hand; that there must ever be mutuality of obligation. Our attitude is necessary and proper when we insist upon complete Americanization as a matter of duty on the part of the immigrant; but it is proper only if we give to the immigrant who fully performs this duty a full and frank assurance that in return he shall be admitted to an absolute equality of right with the native-born. It is a wicked and abhorrent thing for any American of German parentage or German birth to fail to denounce the action of Germany in the case of the *Galfricht* and the *Lucitania* precisely as he would denounce it if the offense were committed by an English or a French instead of a German submarine. It is a wicked and abhorrent thing for such a citizen not to understand that his whole and undivided loyalty is due to the United States, and only to the United States. But it is no less wicked and abhorrent to discriminate against the good citizen who is without reserve and completely an American because he is of German birth or descent—and, incidentally, the present writer is partly of German descent. Moreover, such misconduct tends to defeat its own nominal purpose, for it tends to perpetuate the evil principle of group division by nationalities, of dual nationalism, of poly-nationalism, in American life.

This is just as true when the animosity is directed against the professors of a given creed as when it is directed against citizens of a given national origin. The very fact that we believe as one of the cardinal principles of American public policy in the non-sectarian public school, supported by the money of the state, for all who desire education at the expense of the state, should make us insist that Catholic and Protestant, Jew and Gentile, are in every respect treated alike as regards these schools. The Catholic must be given exactly the same rights as the Protestant in the management of the schools, and in teaching in them. The Protestant who tries to keep a School Board exclusively Protestant is an enemy of the public schools; and so he is if he tries to do the same thing with the teaching force.

Of course this applies in every form of public life. The citizen, whether Catholic or Protestant, Jew or Gentile, who votes for a public man because he is of the same religious creed is a poor citizen, an unworthy citizen; and he is just as poor a citizen, just as unworthy of the name

of American, if he votes against a man because he is a Catholic, a Protestant or a Jew. Whenever in any state a party and a creed tend to become identified the result is, and can only be, mischievous. Let good citizens remember that this mischief is bilateral. Just as much damage to Americanism is being done by the Protestant who votes against a man because he is a Catholic as by the Catholic who tries to put a man in office because he is a Catholic. Each, whatever his private relations, is from the public standpoint a bad citizen. Each, moreover, is doing harm to the cause he represents. The Jew who without regard to party or principle votes for every Jew on any ticket who is opposed by a Christian, is strengthening the hands of the equally undesirable Christian, who without regard to party or principle votes against every Jew on any ticket. The Protestants who form associations to oppose the election to office of good citizens merely because they are Catholics, or to oppose men who do equal justice to Catholics, are in reality the allies of the very persons who wish to keep the Catholics as a separate body, aloof in interest from their fellow citizens, and out of touch with the most distinctly American currents of our political life. What is true of such Protestants is equally true of Catholics who act in similar fashion. Injustice done by the men of one religious faith in the name of that religious faith, to those of another faith, tends to weld all who are thus discriminated against, good and bad alike, into one solid and hostile mass. Fair treatment is the only solvent in such cases. If each man is treated on his worth as a man, without regard to creed, it will rapidly grow impossible to hold the man thus well treated in a condition of political solidarity with those of his own creed from whom he differs for political reasons or of whom he disapproves on moral grounds. The opposite course merely forces good and bad alike to make common cause against an enemy who himself makes no discrimination between good and evil. The result of such action is wholly mischievous. Injustice and unfair action invite unjust and unfair action in return. The only healthy political—or other—association, the only association that can permanently do good in American life, is the association of men, without regard to creed, whose political principles and whose standards of decency and good citizenship impel them to act together for a common purpose; and in every such association, political, military, civic, industrial or social, where real good is done to our common country, it will be found as a matter of fact that men of all creeds and of all types of national origin are working together for a common and worthy end.