

APRIL 15, 1968LOGAN MORRILL

"If you're so rich, why aren't you happy?," is a question Uncle Sam could ask himself after 7 straight years of the most widespread, the most fabulous prosperity in the history of our world.

True, happiness as a national concern is not an old concept. The 18th Century revolutionary, Saint-Just, once remarked that "Happiness is a new idea in Europe." Jefferson's insertion of "pursuit of happiness," along with life and liberty, in the Declaration of Independence was a novel product of the Age of Enlightenment. And a sensible one, too. What could be more valid than pursuing happiness after the needs of life and liberty have been secured?

What bothers me is that we don't seem to have done much about this pursuit since 1776. For a while, achieving subsistence was so gruelling a task that there just wasn't much time for anything else. That's no longer true. Yet I'm not aware that we're even now concerned with seeking national happiness: la felicité nationale as it was called by philosophers in the Age of Enlightenment. Indeed, I doubt if the happiness factor has even been identified. This unidentified happiness factor, UHF, if you please, may be just as important to modern well-being as the comfort, self-indulgence and pursuit of affluence with which we seem to be obsessed.

Could we have ignored the happiness factor because of our preoccupation with Marxism, an essentially unhappy creed? I don't mean just because we've adopted so many Marxist tenets, such as steeply graduated taxes and universal education. Nor because we're fighting a "cold" war to keep the neo-Marxists from burying us. But rather because we have embraced a compulsive system of economic determinism that would turn Karl Marx's grim gills green with envy.

If it seems strained to link the American mores to Marxist economic determinism, let's glance at the progression this way: to Marx, only materialism had meaning and the economic misery of the masses was the Hegelian "thesis" on which Marx's writings were founded. His antithesis was that history's goal is

the achievement of material equality for those masses. The synthesis which Marx foresaw as the inevitable result of dialectical materialism was the destruction of capitalism and the dictatorship of the proletariat. In Western socio-capitalism, the Marxist thesis and antithesis have persisted, but the synthesis has worked out quite differently. The masses haven't destroyed capitalism; they've gradually migrated into the capitalistic means of production (and service also -- an insignificant economic area in Marx's time), thus relegating the "proletariat" to a minority position, -- less than 20% of the population.

In the meantime, the dialectic process has produced an affluent society more materialistically-oriented than Marx could have conceived. Marx's dialectical bases were accurate; his prophecy went far astray.

Indeed, in their ingenious exploitation of capitalism, the affluent U.S. masses have not only enjoyed the wages of their labor; they've gone a step farther. They've learned to use future wages today by means of massive borrowing. Last year they borrowed over \$27 billion just to buy automobiles. 3/4 of the new cars manufactured were bought on the cuff: the highest proportion ever.

The socialistic super-capitalism isn't only personal. It's corporate as well. In 1967, business borrowed \$46 billion more than it paid back, in order to finance the purchase of inventory, machinery and buildings to do business with in the future.

In this materialistic society, money has become nationally equated with accomplishment. Do we need culture? Spend \$50 million on the new Metropolitan Opera. Modernize education? Princeton must increase its building budget as much as Harvard does. The first qualification of a public school administrator is to be an expert lobbyist. A vote against any educational appropriation, no matter how swollen, is equated as a vote against children.

But what about the thought that, after all, the success of the learning process depends mostly upon the effort of the student? Or that the performing

arts exist only for the purpose of interaction between artists and audiences? Could there be a possibility that learning, and the arts, are enervated rather than promoted by monumentally lavish structures and budgets? Well, a McGraw-Hill study cites the conclusion that the so-called "More Effective Schools" program in New York, "that raised instructional costs from \$434 to \$994 per pupil, has not had any significant...effect on the children's performance..." An architect familiar with the Lincoln Center project told me that the Philharmonic Hall could have been better acoustically if it had been half as expensive.

The spending carnival reaches its apex every Christmas season. This used to commence in mid-December; now it's extended to Thanksgiving and is reaching back toward Halloween. With TV help, it will get there. But what about the shoppers? Are they happy? From parents of youngsters, I hear more complaints about the financial pressures than expressions of Yuletide joy. One evening at the height of the past Christmas shopping season, I stood at the corner of 5th and Vine and watched the crowds pass, 4 deep. Brows were knitted, mouths taut and strained; I didn't see a smile or hear a laugh.

I doubt if it could be proved that the contemporary generations are more unhappy, and more frustrated, than their predecessors. But that conclusion, it would seem to me, is damning. Why, after a century of considerable social and vast technological progress, should we not be markedly more happy? Since we appear not to be, then why are only a handful of humanistic philosophers, like Mumford, Fromm, Hoffer and Galbraith seriously concerned with individual fulfillment and happiness? It's perhaps a cliché to answer that we've been too busy with technology and materialism, but it's true. Can we continue to afford this preoccupation as the Age of Circuitry closes in around us?

Marshall McLuhan, of course, is the analyst, and perhaps the prophet of the Age of Circuitry. His verbal acrobatics and analytical embellishments are controversial. I think the center core of his message is not. Television, electronic data processing and the other aspects of electronic circuitry are altering the environment more swiftly and completely than the

invention of printing did in the 14th Century.

Even 20 years ago, there was no environmental attraction that could hypnotize scores of millions of people into the glazed stares of contemporary TV viewers. At another level of circuitry, the EDP computer is revolutionizing business methods. As checks replaced currency banking, so checkless, computerized transactions are about to replace commercial checking accounts. "Performance" mutual investment funds depend on the instantaneous information of electronic circuitry. Some experts think these high pressure pools are going to make traditional investing obsolete. Without computers, industrial conglomerates on the huge scale of Litton Industries and International Telephone and Telegraph would be impossible to manage. At the current rate of proliferation, most of American business will be transacted by gigantic conglomerates a few years hence. Only TV promotion induces lavish installment buying by over half the population. This buying is indispensable to prosperity. And so it is that in less than a generation the instantaneous information of electronic circuitry has become the most influential and aggressive power in our environment.

Look at what's happening in race relations, the most aggravated contemporary problem. Marshall McLuhan thinks that TV "definitely...was partly responsible for the summer rioting" of 1967. That's scarcely surprising. But conservative Mayor Hetfield of Plainfield, N.J., agrees. So does radical Detroit minister Albert C. Cleague, Jr. Columnist Marquis Childs notes that the rioters are often migrants from southern states: "dispossessed, displaced, unwanted people...the looters and arsonists seizing pieces of the affluence they see all around them." The Wall Street Journal adds: "The idea that pictures on a TV screen might help set off a riot is no indictment of TV," -- and so it is not. But it's more a footnote to the history of McLuhan's Age of Circuitry. Perhaps TV doesn't lie deep in the eiology of ghetto rioting. But it may be the precipitating cause and it may be the proximate of violence on a national scale. Violence is unfortunate; violence on a national scale is tragic.

The tragedy is ironic. In the words of Negro Colonel Daniel James, Jr.: "These riots are the worst

thing that could happen to the Negroes' cause. This could set the Civil Rights movement back 100 years." But why not use the power of TV to convince the black minority that they can gain equality only through legal and non-violent means? (There are just too many whites for it to be otherwise!) And to convince the white majority that no effort is too strenuous for the purpose of establishing that equality? Not with deliberate speed, but with utmost speed, if only in expiation of 2 centuries of legal slavery and another century of political and economic slavery. The screaming hypocrisy of this condition, in a nation solemnly founded on freedom and equality for all, should make the correction a national compulsion, not a mere ad hoc riot preventive. One columnist (1) puts it bluntly from another angle: "In dreadful truth, no effort and no sacrifice, no outlay and no self-denial can be too great to avert the impending nightmare of black racists incity hall (arrayed against) white racists in the suburbs."

But no-one in the Establishment seems inclined to face, much less to cure, the barbarism that underlies our racial unhappiness.

For instance, about 3 years ago, Daniel Patrick Moynihan, an Assistant Secretary of Labor, wrote his report on the Negro family: "The report, itself," comments a columnist, "was based on a simple logic, long familiar to sociologists. The logic is this: unemployment and poverty erode the stability of lower class families, and this in turn inflicts severe deprivations on their children." So the Negro family, and thus the Negro community, has disintegrated. The governmental establishment at first welcomed the Moynihan report as a more profound approach to a desperate national problem that had been viewed as a mere matter of dollars. It was the "source of President Johnson's memorable Howard University speech." But the reaction of established civil rights organizations was "Hostile." They visualized an entire restructuring of the civil rights movement: "to turn public attention to the slums' style of life, rather than Federal negligence, as the source of the Negroes's poverty."

(1) Joseph Alsop, Washington Post, 3/18/68

Moynihan was finally "driven" out of Washington in what one commentator called "a great political disaster." So, achieving economic and social equality for the Negro lapsed again into a routine succession of "welfare" projects; buying clarity of conscience for the donors, no doubt, but hardly furthering the pursuit of happiness for Negroes.

True, the report of the Kerner Riot Commission candidly assigned the familiar causes of Negro unhappiness and desperation: segregation, discrimination, concentration of poverty in the ghettos, and the squalor, degradation, bitterness and alienation of those ghettos. The Commission prescribed remedial programs, but seemed to place even more importance on eradicating the white "racism that it deemed rampant in American society."

I'd suggest that as the Moynihan report implied the necessity to restructure the Negro family and mores, so the Kerner report implied that viable American unity won't be achieved until white postures are reoriented. If these conclusions are sound, and I suspect they are, then the specific recommendations of the Kerner report are only the condition precedent, the first of many steps, toward eliminating the unhappiness of a significant minority without which the majority can scarcely achieve happiness.

If this seems to be a novel concept, consider these prophetic words in 1903:

"(The Negro) race was transplanted through the criminal foolishness of your fathers. Whether you like it or not, the millions (of Negroes) are here, and here they will remain. If you do not lift them up, they will pull you down."

And again in 1935:

"(The Negro's) frustration cannot indefinitely continue. Some day it may burst in fire and flood. Who will be to blame? And where the greater cost? Black folk, after all, have little to lose, but civilization has all."\*

\* W.E.B. DuBois

In case these prophecies appear biased, link them to the advice of Atlanta's Mayor Allen in March 1968:

"We (Whites) are responsible for the condition the Negro is in today. It is a matter of first priority that we do what the (Kerner) Commission (requests)."

At this point a personal disclaimer: this paper isn't a socio-political tract. I'm not qualified by predilection or training to examine sociologically how God is not in His Heaven and all's wrong with the world. Rather I would hope to suggest a few insights, poetic insights, if you please. We're already deafened by a plethora of noisy socio-economic polemics. Perhaps what we need is more intuitive insights.

The familiar though crucial paradox, it seems to me, is that although poverty creates unhappiness, affluence does not create happiness.

One columnist comments, "Prosperity has never been greater nor malcontent more organized." Another points out: "The European nations with the highest suicide rates (a fair inverse barometer of happiness) -- Denmark, Austria and Switzerland -- are most prosperous and are highly organized toward social welfare. The nations with the lowest (suicide rates) -- Portugal and Ireland -- are hardscrabble countries." Business Week Magazine headlines, "Although prosperity never has been greater, a sense of dissatisfaction permeates the land." Roper Research Associates recently quizzed an assorted group as to whether they though increased affluence had made us more, or less, happy. 25% answered more; 45% answered less. Then, a Cambridge scholar writes: "Man is being urbanized at an incredible rate. Packed as dense as a shoal of whitebait, he is harried by noise, choked with filth... (He is) a screaming ball of angst in an urban prison whose lights wink at him like a crazed and incontrollable computer."

Is "the Marxian notion that economic deprivation is the root of social unrest" (1) a false thesis? Could it be that "a disposition to treat (the deprived, including) Negroes, fairly, a will to eliminate the manifold inequities that daily grate on (their) sense

(1) Joseph Kraft, Washington Post, 3/3/68

of self-esteem -- (1)"? Could this be the true thesis for modern American living? If so, could the valid antithesis be pursuit of happiness for all rather than pursuit of materialism by the affluent majority? Possibly the most influential modern critic thinks so. He writes:

"I find one overriding fault (in the present U.S. Economic System): too much emphasis on goods and not enough on beauty and man's search for higher values . . . Instead of working 40 hours a week in order to buy the full panoply of gadgets he sees on TV, might not man be happier working only 25 hours and giving up some of the goods?" (2)

If these be the synthesis and antithesis, how, then can we discover the synthesis is, the "Design for Living" that the Age of Circuitry demands? Surely the prevailing environmental trends will go on, probably at an accelerated pace: agglomeration, urbanization, mechanization, and proliferation of instantaneous information will not be denied. Used wisely, they could foster the kind of national and individual fulfillment that nourishes individual happiness.

Then what's wrong? Is urbanization crushing the territorial imperative? Does "the mere fact of overcrowding have in it the seeds of decay and destruction," as one authority hypothesizes? Is man "shackled to his most destructive invention, the Megamachine," as Lewis Mumford suggests, alienating him from the "ritual, art, poesy, music, dance, philosophy, myth and religion that are all as essential to man as his daily bread?"

In building a society where 80% of the population have escaped poverty, have we simultaneously created a land of envy, where, as one writer thinks, "Each class in American society wants the benefits and comforts and living standards of the class above" and is unhappy because the interminable escalation always leaves a class above? If so, is this evidence of healthy ambition or of self-destructive neurosis? Has the happiness factor potential in this society been forgotten, or buried, before it's even discovered?

(2) J.K. Galbraith, Time, 2/16/68

One editor finds "comfort, if comfort there be, that things are not much different from what they were 1,971 years ago." Perhaps so, but if we've made no progress in "design for living" over 2 millenia, shouldn't we begin seeking progress now? Isn't pursuit of happiness as valid a national goal as Thomas Jefferson and his enlightened contemporaries were convinced it was?

Is it hopeless to suggest a less materialistic, more beatific, less avarice, more ontology, if you please, national goal? John F. Kennedy, possibly the most charismatic contemporary politician, didn't think so. It would be woeful indeed to conclude that this enormously endowed country is compelled to decline and fall as other rich, materialistic civilizations have.

In a time when we devote unlimited brainpower toward solving problems of micro-circuitry, cybernetics, synergistics, nano-second cycles, astronautics, oceanology and DNA, in a time when our store of technical knowledge doubles every 10 or 15 years -- in this time shouldn't we devote important thought, also, to solving some problems of humanology? Is this a mere rhetorical question? Well, as practical a visionary as General David Sarnoff said in July a year ago, "The acquisition of scientific information alone is approaching 250 million pages annually. The tide of knowledge is overwhelming the human capability for dealing with it." The General sounds like a modern Mary Godwin tolling the bell for a McLuhanistic fulfillment of the Frankenstein prophecy. But the Nestor of columnists (1), with his usual stentorian understatement, sounds a broader note: "The True American Problem is...the mastery of human adjustment to the modern urban, highly technological society in which most Americans live."

In the race for this "mastery of human adjustment," we're running faster than we did a decade or 2 ago. But the "highly technological" environment is moving like an accelerating escalator, rushing ever faster, ever steeper, toward a supersonic asymptote. One is forced to wonder if, instead of always stepping

(1) Walter Lippmann, Washington Post, 3/3/68

harder on the accelerator, Uncle Sam shouldn't utilize some of his mastery of adjustment for decelerating the escalator and looking to the UHF: to his own felicity.

If he did that, he wouldn't be so rich, but he might be a whole lot happier.

Logan Morrill

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