

EDITOR'S COMMENT

One of the Greats

It can be pretty unnerving to have one of the great American thinkers of the 20th century shamble into your office and flop into a chair for a little afternoon kibitzing. That was a privilege I occasionally enjoyed when Seymour Martin Lipset was a senior scholar at the Wilson Center, and, like a lot of other people, I soon came to delight in the company of this man who seemed like a brilliant, oversized, and unexpected addition to my list of uncles. Marty died this past New Year's Eve at the age of 84, and it's hard to add much to the flood of articles in his honor (including our own item on p. 10 and others at www.usip.org/memorial/lipset). He thought and wrote about many subjects during his long career, but he will be best remembered as the person who, like no other since Tocqueville, showed Americans who they are. In books such as *The First New Nation* (1963), Marty created so persuasive a portrait of America as an "exceptional" nation that many now take this view for granted. The United States, he wrote, is a nation built upon ideas and values rather than ethnicity or faith, forever negotiating the tension between its egalitarian and its individualistic commitments.

Marty was a social scientist, but the humane quality of his thinking was one of the things that set him apart. While he didn't shy from the occasional regression analysis and his work was studded with footnotes that reflected his wide-ranging intellectual appetite, he was not in thrall to the pretensions of science. He was a gatherer of facts, experiences, ideas, and aperçus, and all of these were evident in his thinking, giving it a suppleness and realism rarely seen in contemporary social science. There should be more like him. In some ways he was the intellectual equivalent of the family doctor—not necessarily much for the very latest technology, but precisely the person you turn to when you need to know what's really going on. He was a man you always greeted with a smile, and he will be remembered that way, too.

—STEVEN LAGERFELD



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FINDINGS

BRIEF NOTES OF INTEREST ON ALL TOPICS

Exceptional American

The public intellectual

On December 31, 2006, Seymour Martin Lipset died at 84. The obituarists' encomiums were lofty—"one of the most influential social scientists of the past half-century" (*The Washington Post*), "a leading expert in democracy" (*The New York Times*), "Tocqueville's heir" (*The Weekly Standard*)—and amply deserved.

Lipset was the author of *American Exceptionalism* (1996) and some 20 other books, the only person to serve as president of both the American Political Science Association and the American Sociological Association, a senior fellow of the Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars, and a *Wilson Quarterly* author and editorial adviser.

Marty Lipset established himself as a leading public intellectual long before the term came into vogue. But when the occasion called for it, he could be a shrewd critic of the American intelligentsia too. In *Encounter* magazine (April 1957), he published an article that is characteristically incisive and clear-headed, as well as strikingly relevant 50 years later.



Seymour Martin Lipset (1922–2006): the consummate American public intellectual.

Why, Lipset asked, do American academics complain so much about the hoi polloi's anti-intellectualism? Polls find that people highly respect college professors. True, intellectuals generally enjoy higher status in Europe, but so do all elites. In comparing themselves with their European counterparts, Lipset wrote, "what many American intellectuals fail to see is that they are objecting to the egalitarian value system of America, rather than to the lower status of the intellectual in America."

Another grievance of the American professoriate—academics earn a fraction of what corporate executives make—simply reflects the difference

between public-sector salaries and private-sector ones. "The professor who complains that he could earn much more in private industry does not recognize that this very fact disproves the thesis that his talents are undervalued. Rather he, like the lawyer who has chosen to be a judge or politician rather than a corporation counsel, has indicated that the noneconomic rewards . . . outweigh monetary gain."

Lipset went on to argue that anti-intellectualism in the United States typically targets an ideology, not a group. Which ideology? "The dominant coloration of the social science academicians, of most of the significant literary figures, of the intellectual

journals of opinion, has always been on the left of the political spectrum. . . . The political bent of the American intellectual happens to be a fact, whether one shares it (as I myself do, more or less) or detests it." The Right denounces intellectuals, then, just as the Left denounces corporations. That's politics.

American academics should "frankly defend their right to be heard as advocates of a point of view, much as do labor unions and business groups." But they shouldn't expect ivy-covered walls to shield them from criticism. A small-d democrat par excellence, Lipset concluded, "If a position is unpopular and consequences are to be faced for holding it—well, if one wants to participate in politics, one must face up to the consequences, and not suddenly claim to be above the battle and shriek 'anti-intellectualism' whenever the guns are turned in one's direction."

Working Woes

On-the-job nostalgia

Bad news for workers—that's been the message of a slew of books for more than a decade. Between the global economy, multinational corporations, outsourcing, hostile takeovers, independent contractors, and other shifts, our jobs are less secure than ever.

In *The Sociological Review* (Feb. 2007), Tim Strangleman of the University of Kent at Canterbury challenges that popular thesis. Long before callers seeking

tech help were routed to New Delhi, Karl Marx wrote that modern capitalism causes the "disturbance of all social relations, everlasting uncertainty and agitation." Strangleman interviewed British railway workers in the 1990s and found that they longed for a golden past; another researcher got similar responses from trainmen in the 1980s, and yet another in the 1960s. The steadfast stability of the workplace turns out to lie in the recurrent proclamations of its unprecedented instability.

Paperless Trails

Error messages

In *Send: The Essential Guide to Email for Office and Home* (Knopf), David Shipley and Will Schwalbe list some ill-considered e-mail phrases that have ended up in court records: "Can we get away with it?" "They'll never find out." "This might not be legal." "DELETE THIS EMAIL!"

The Master's Voice

A Remington rhythm

In 1897, suffering from writer's cramp, Henry James (1843–1916) began dictating to a typist. The result was a new style, baggy and meandering. "I know that I'm too diffuse when I'm dictating," James told his typist, Theodora Bosanquet, but "it all seems to be so much more effectively and unceasingly *pulled* out of me in speech than in writing." The clacking of the Remington "acted as a positive spur," Bosanquet later recounted.

When the typewriter was being repaired, James found the muted mutter of the substitute, an Oliver, "almost impossibly disconcerting."

In late 1915, James suffered a stroke and then contracted pneumonia. He called for Bosanquet and the Remington. In *The Iron Whim: A Fragmented History of Typewriting* (Cornell Univ. Press), Darren Wershler-Henry reports that James dictated several sentences and then, inexplicably, two letters purportedly from Napoleon. The novelist seemed to find comfort in the clatter of his mechanical muse.

After James died, according to Wershler-Henry, Bosanquet tried to re-establish contact through automatic writing, a spiritualist practice of communicating with the Other Side. Bosanquet's pen moved and she thought she received messages from James, but it just wasn't the same. Whether she tried automatic typewriting is unrecorded.

The Medium Is the Maker

The wires of Hell

Marshall McLuhan (1911–80), guru of the electronic age, had a god of his own. In his twenties, McLuhan read G. K. Chesterton's essays and began questioning his family's polyglot Protestantism,

