



In the background are Blake Hall and Old Fraser Hall on the University of Kansas campus. In the foreground are two young men who could perhaps have been in Becker's classes during his time teaching in Lawrence.

“Americanism Transplanted”: Carl Becker’s Kansas

by Carl L. Becker, with a foreword by Eric Brandom and Kristen Epps

This issue launches a new series wherein *Kansas History* reprints influential articles from the *Kansas Historical Quarterly* and other publications to bring these classic studies of our past to a new generation. The *Quarterly* preceded *Kansas History* and was published from 1931 to 1977. Each issue’s selection will include a brief foreword by one of today’s scholars, followed by the reprinted article.

Although it did not appear in the *Quarterly*, a natural starting place for the series is Carl L. Becker’s 1910 essay, simply titled “Kansas.”¹ At the time Becker taught in the history department at the University of Kansas, having been trained under the enormously influential Western historian Frederick Jackson Turner, today remembered for the “Turner thesis” or “frontier thesis,” which forwarded a romanticized, Anglocentric perspective on westward expansion. For Turner, America became America on the frontier, “the meeting point between savagery and civilization.”² This interpretation relied on the tacit removal of Native peoples from history so that their active removal could be constitutive of American national self-development. Every new (white) settlement on the frontier, Turner claimed, effectively returned to the primitive state, providing a leaven of new energy and character for the nation as a whole. Turner’s argument was attractive in its sweep and simplicity and, coming as it did in the 1890s, as a justification for the pursuit of empire in the wider world in place of the recently closed frontier. It is worth bearing in mind some of the above points about Turner, because Becker’s essay begins by applying Turner’s framework to Kansas. In the end, however, as the reader will see, especially in the later sections, Becker moves in a different direction.

A scholar of early America and Europe, Becker left KU and relocated to Cornell University in 1916 before becoming president of the American Historical Association in 1931. Historians outside Kansas likely associate Becker mainly with his provocative presidential address, “Everyman His Own Historian.” Yet his reflections on the Sunflower State, and what it means to have a Kansas “state of mind,” reverberate

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1. Well-known Kansas historian Dudley Cornish, who taught at Pittsburg State University, published in the *Quarterly* a version of his Kansas State Historical Society presidential address from October 1974 that reflected on Becker’s essay. See Dudley T. Cornish, “Carl Becker’s Kansas: The Power of Endurance,” *Kansas Historical Quarterly* 41, no. 1 (Spring 1975): 1–13.

2. Frederick Jackson Turner, “The Significance of the Frontier in American History,” in *The Frontier in American History* (New York: Henry Holt & Co., 1910), 3, www.loc.gov/item/20018058/.

in myriad ways.³ Shortly after its publication, the *University Daily Kansan* described it as a “romance . . . a story of a prairie country that won the love of a people.”⁴ Decades later, George Neavoll, an editor at the *Wichita Eagle*, marveled at how the “Kansas spirit” of Becker’s essay “has been made evident to this transplanted Kansan many times since I first set foot on Kansas soil. Though that has only been a relatively short time ago, I feel like a native Kansan today—in fact, always have. . . . Dear old Kansas. The notion may seem absurd to anyone who hasn’t fallen under its spell, but to be apart from Kansas for any length of time is like being apart from one’s most cherished love.”⁵ In Thomas Fox Averill’s beloved anthology *What Kansas Means to Me*, fittingly, the first essay is Becker’s.⁶

Central to Becker’s essay is the Kansan approach to freedom and equality as he saw it in 1910. It is essential to acknowledge that neither the Kansas government nor its people have always espoused equality for all, as the *Brown v. Board of Education* case, existence of sundown towns, and confinement of Indigenous people to reservations make so clear. Reading Becker in 2023, one is struck not only by the elegance and wit of his prose but also by the many people who do not seem to appear, or to count, in the Kansas he describes.

Following Becker’s essay, we share one of his lesser-known productions, an editorial in the *Tiller and Toiler* newspaper, from December 9, 1910, titled “Value of the University to the State.”⁷ Here, Becker ruminates on the value of public education and its

role in nurturing an educated citizenry, a theme just as timely and relevant today as it was in Becker’s day. With that, we hope you will contemplate how Becker’s essay and editorial—now over a century old—might inform our understanding of the contemporary world.

“Kansas” by Carl L. Becker

Some years ago, in a New England college town, when I informed one of my New England friends that I was preparing to go to Kansas, he replied rather blankly, “Kansas?! Oh.” The amenities of casual intercourse demanded a reply, certainly, but from the point of view of my New England friend I suppose there was really nothing more to say; and, in fact, standing there under the peaceful New England elms, Kansas did seem tolerably remote. Some months later I rode out of Kansas City and entered for the first time what I had always pictured as the land of grasshoppers, of arid drought, and barren social experimentation. In the seat just ahead were two young women, girls rather, whom I afterwards saw at the university. As we left the dreary yards behind, and entered the half-open country along the Kansas River, one of the pair, breaking abruptly away from the ceaseless chatter that had hitherto engrossed them both, began looking out of the car window. Her attention seemed fixed, for perhaps a quarter of an hour, upon something in the scene outside—the fields of corn, or it may have been the sunflowers that lined the track; but at last, turning to her companion with the contented sigh of a returning exile, she said, “Dear old Kansas!” The expression somehow recalled my New England friend. I wondered vaguely, as I was sure he would have done, why any one should feel moved to say “Dear old Kansas!” I had supposed that Kansas, even more than Italy, was only a geographical expression. But not so. Not infrequently, since then, I have heard the same expression—not always from emotional young girls. To understand why people say “Dear old Kansas!” is to understand that Kansas is no mere geographical expression, but a “state of mind,” a

3. “Presidential Addresses,” American Historical Association, accessed August 9, 2023, www.historians.org/about-aha-and-membership/aha-history-and-archives/presidential-addresses.

4. “Professor Writes Romance of Kansas,” *University Daily Kansan*, December 9, 1912.

5. George Neavoll, “What Makes Kansas Kansas,” *Wichita Eagle*, January 31, 1982.

6. Carl Becker, “Kansas,” in *What Kansas Means to Me: Twentieth-Century Writers on the Sunflower State*, ed. Thomas Fox Averill, rev. ed. (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 1990), 19–50.

7. This article appeared in some other newspaper before the *Tiller and Toiler*, published in Larned, because an article in the *Salina Evening Journal* on December 6, 1910, mentions it with some commentary. Its original appearance is still to be uncovered, but it appears to have been written around the same time as his “Kansas” essay.



Carl Becker on the University of Kansas campus in 1916, in clover. Courtesy of the Division of Rare and Manuscript Collections, Cornell University Library.

religion, and a philosophy in one.

The difference between the expression of my staid New England friend and that of the enthusiastic young Kansan, is perhaps symbolical, in certain respects, of the difference between those who remain at home and those who, in successive generations, venture into the unknown "West,"—New England or Kansas,—wherever it may be. In the seventeenth century there was doubtless no lack of Englishmen—prelates for example, in lawn sleeves, comfortably buttressed about by tithes and the Thirty-nine Articles—who might have indicated their point of view quite fully by remarking, "New England?! Oh." Whether any New Englander of that day ever went so far as to say "Dear old New

England," I do not know. But that the sentiment was there, furnishing fuel for the inner light, is past question. Now-a-days the superiority of New England is taken for granted, I believe, by the people who live there; but in the seventeenth century, when its inhabitants were mere frontiersmen, they were given, much as Kansans are said to be now, to boasting,—alas! even of the climate. In 1629, Mr. Higginson, a reverend gentleman, informed his friends back in England that

The temper of the aire of New England is one special thing that commends this place. Experience doth manifest that there is hardly a more healthful place to be found in the

world that agreeth better with our English bodyes. Many that have been weake and sickly in old England, by coming hither have been thoroughly healed and growne healthfull strong. For here is a most extraordinarie cleere and dry aire that is of a most healing nature to all such as are of a cold, melancholy, flegmatick, rheumatick temper of body. . . . And therefore I think it a wise course for all cold complexions to come to take physic in New England; for a sup of New England aire is better than a whole draft of Old England's ale.

Now, we who live in Kansas know well that its climate is superior to any other in the world, and that it enables one, more readily than any other, to dispense with the use of ale.

There are those who will tell us, and have indeed often told us, with a formidable array of statistics, that Kansas is inhabited only in small part by New Englanders, and that it is therefore fanciful in the extreme to think of it as representing Puritanism transplanted. It is true, the people of Kansas came mainly from "the Middle West"—from Illinois, Indiana, Ohio, Iowa, Kentucky, and Missouri. But for our purpose the fact is of little importance, for it is the ideals of a people rather than the geography they have outgrown that determine their destiny; and in Kansas, as has been well said, "it is the ideas of the Pilgrims, not their descendants, that have had dominion in the young commonwealth." Ideas, sometimes, as well as the star of empire, move westward, and so it happens that Kansas is more Puritan than New England of to-day. It is akin to New England of early days. It is what New England, old England itself, once was—the frontier, an ever changing spot where dwell the courageous who defy fate and conquer circumstance.

For the frontier is more than a matter of location, and Puritanism is itself a kind of frontier. There is an intellectual "West" as well as a territorial "West." Both are heresies, the one as much subject to the scorn of the judicious as the other. Broad classifications of people are easily made and are

usually inaccurate; but they are convenient for taking a large view, and it may be worth while to think, for the moment, of two kinds of people—those who like the sheltered life, and those who cannot endure it, those who think the world as they know it is well enough, and those who dream of something better, or, at any rate, something different. From age to age society builds its shelters of various sorts—accumulated traditions, religious creeds, political institutions, and intellectual conceptions, cultivated and well kept farms, well built and orderly cities—providing a monotonous and comfortable life that tends always to harden into conventional forms resisting change. With all this the home-keeping and timid are well content. They sit in accustomed corners, disturbed by no fortuitous circumstance. But there are those others who are forever tugging at the leashes of ordered life, eager to venture into the unknown. Forsaking beaten paths, they plunge into the wilderness. They must be always on the frontier of human endeavor, submitting what is old and accepted to conditions that are new and untried. The frontier is thus the seed plot where new forms of life, whether of institutions or types of thought, are germinated, the condition of all progress being in a sense a return to the primitive.

Now, generally speaking, the men who make the world's frontiers, whether in religion or politics, science, or geographical exploration and territorial settlement, have certain essential and distinguishing qualities. They are primarily men of faith. Having faith in themselves, they are individualists. They are idealists because they have faith in the universe, being confident that somehow everything is right at the center of things; they give hostages to the future, are ever inventing God anew, and must be always transforming the world into their ideal of it. They have faith in humanity and in the perfectibility of man, are likely, therefore, to be believers in equality, reformers, intolerant, aiming always to level others up to their own high vantage. These qualities are not only Puritan, they are American; and Kansas is not only Puritanism

transplanted, but Americanism transplanted. In the individualism, the idealism, the belief in equality that prevail in Kansas, we shall therefore see nothing strangely new, but simply a new graft of familiar American traits. But as Kansas is a community with a peculiar and distinctive experience, there is something peculiar and distinctive about the individualism, the idealism, and the belief in equality of its people. If we can get at this something peculiar and distinctive, it will be possible to understand why the sight of sunflowers growing beside a railroad track may call forth the fervid expression, "Dear old Kansas."

I

Individualism is everywhere characteristic of the frontier, and in America, where the geographical frontier has hitherto played so predominant a part, a peculiarly marked type of individualism is one of the most obvious traits of the people. "To the frontier," Professor Turner has said, "the American intellect owes its striking characteristics. That coarseness and strength combined with acuteness and inquisitiveness; that practical, inventive turn of mind, quick to find expedients; that masterful grasp of material things, lacking in the artistic but powerful to effect great ends; that restless nervous energy; that dominant individualism, working for good and for evil, and withal that buoyancy and exuberance that comes from freedom." On the frontier, where everything is done by the individual and nothing by organized society, initiative, resourcefulness, quick, confident, and sure judgment are the essential qualities for success. But as the problems of the frontier are rather restricted and definite, those who succeed there have necessarily much the same kind of initiative and resourcefulness, and their judgment will be sure only in respect to the problems that are familiar to all. It thus happens that the type of individualism produced on the frontier and predominant in America, has this peculiarity, that while the sense of freedom is strong, there is nevertheless a certain uniformity in respect to ability,

habit, and point of view. The frontier develops strong individuals, but it develops individuals of a particular type, all being after much the same pattern. The individualism of the frontier is one of achievement, not of eccentricity, an individualism of fact arising from a sense of power to overcome obstacles, rather than one of theory growing out of weakness in the face of oppression. It is not because he fears governmental activity, but because he has so often had to dispense with it, that the American is an individualist. Altogether averse from hesitancy, doubt, speculative or introspective tendencies, the frontiersman is a man of faith: of faith, not so much in some external power, as in himself, in his luck, his destiny; faith in the possibility of achieving whatever is necessary or he desires. It is this marked self-reliance that gives to Americans their tremendous power of initiative; but the absence of deep-seated differences gives to them an equally tremendous power of concerted social action.

The confident individualism of those who achieve through endurance is a striking trait of the people of Kansas. There, indeed, the trait has in it an element of exaggeration, arising from the fact that whatever has been achieved in Kansas has been achieved under great difficulties. Kansans have been subjected, not only to the ordinary hardships of the frontier, but to a succession of reverses and disasters that could be survived only by those for whom defeat is worse than death, who cannot fail because they cannot surrender. To the border wars succeeded hot winds, droughts, grasshoppers; and to the disasters of nature succeeded in turn the scourge of man, in the form of "mortgage fiends" and a contracting currency. Until 1895 the whole history of the state was a series of disasters, and always something new, extreme, bizarre, until the name Kansas became a byword, a synonym for the impossible and the ridiculous, inviting laughter, furnishing occasion for jest and hilarity. "In God we trusted, in Kansas we busted," became a favorite motto of emigrants, worn out with the struggle, returning to more hospitable climes; and for many years it expressed well enough the popular opinion



Henry Worrall's Drouthy Kansas is among the most famous, and famously optimistic, images of the state. This 1874 illustration from Harper's Weekly—captioned "Busted!" and ostensibly of a deserted railroad town—presents a very different Kansas to the rest of the country.

of that fated land.

Yet there were some who never gave up. They stuck it out. They endured all that even Kansas could inflict. They kept the faith, and they are to be pardoned perhaps if they therefore feel that henceforth there is laid up for them a crown of glory. Those who remained in Kansas from 1875 to 1895 must have originally possessed staying qualities of no ordinary sort, qualities which the experience of those years could only accentuate. And as success has at last rewarded their efforts, there has come, too, a certain pride, an exuberance, a feeling of superiority that accompany a victory

long delayed and hardly won. The result has been to give a peculiar flavor to the Kansas spirit of individualism. With Kansas history back of him, the true Kansan feels that nothing is *too much* for him. How shall he be afraid of any danger, or hesitate at any obstacle, having succeeded where failure was not only human, but almost honorable? Having conquered Kansas, he knows well that there are no worse worlds to conquer. The Kansas spirit is therefore one that finds something exhilarating in the challenge of an extreme difficulty. "No one," says St. Augustine, "loves what he endures, though he may love to endure." With Kansans,

it is particularly a point of pride to suffer easily the stings of fortune, and if they find no pleasure in the stings themselves, the ready endurance of them gives a consciousness of merit that is its own reward. Yet it is with no solemn martyr's air that the true Kansan endures the worst that can happen. His instinct is rather to pass it off as a minor annoyance, furnishing occasion for a pleasantry, for it is the mark of a Kansan to take a reverse as a joke rather than too seriously. Indeed, the endurance of extreme adversity has developed a keen appreciation for that type of humor, everywhere prevalent in the west, which consists in ignoring a difficulty, or transforming it into a difficulty of precisely the opposite kind. There is a tradition surviving from the grasshopper time that illustrates the point. It is said that in the midst of that overwhelming disaster, when the pests were six inches deep in the streets, the editor of a certain local paper fined his comment on the situation down to a single line, which appeared among the trivial happenings of the week: "A grasshopper was seen on the court-house steps this morning." This type of humor, appreciated anywhere west of the Alleghanies, is the type *par excellence* in Kansas. Perhaps it has rained for six weeks in the spring. The wheat is seemingly ruined; no corn has been planted. A farmer, who sees his profits for the year wiped out, looks at the murky sky, sniffs the damp air, and remarks seriously, "Well, it looks like rain. We may save that crop yet." "Yes," his neighbor replies with equal seriousness, "but it will have to come soon, or it won't do any good." When misfortunes beat down upon one in rapid succession, there comes a time when it is useless to strive against them, and in the end they engender a certain detached curiosity in the victim, who finds a mournful pleasure in observing with philosophical resignation the ultimate caprices of fate. Thus Kansans, "coiners of novel phrases to express their defiance of destiny," have employed humor itself as a refuge against misfortune. They have learned not only to endure adversity, but in a very literal sense to laugh at it as well.

I have already said that the type of individualism that is characteristic of America is one of achievement, not of eccentricity. The statement will bear repeating in this connection, for it is truer of Kansas than of most communities, notwithstanding there is a notion abroad that the state is peopled by freaks and eccentrics. It was once popularly supposed in Europe, and perhaps is so yet, that Americans are all eccentric. Now, Kansans are eccentric in the same sense that Americans are: they differ somewhat from other Americans, just as Americans are distinguishable from Europeans. But a fundamental characteristic of Kansas individualism is the tendency to conform; it is an individualism of conformity, not of revolt. Having learned to endure to the end, they have learned to conform, for endurance is itself a kind of conformity. It has not infrequently been the subject of wondering comment by foreigners that in America, where every one is supposed to do as he pleases, there should nevertheless be so little danger from violence and insurrection. Certainly one reason is that while the conditions of frontier life release the individual from many of the formal restraints of ordered society, they exact a most rigid adherence to lines of conduct inevitably fixed by the stern necessities of life in a primitive community. On the frontier men soon learn to conform to what is regarded as essential, for the penalty of resistance or neglect is extinction: there the law of survival works surely and swiftly. However eccentric frontiersmen may appear to the tenderfoot, among themselves there is little variation from type in any essential matter. In the new community, individualism means the ability of the individual to succeed, not by submitting to some external formal authority, still less by following the bent of an unschooled will, but by recognizing and voluntarily adapting himself to necessary conditions. Kansas, it is true, has produced its eccentrics, but there is a saying here that freaks are raised for export only. In one sense the saying is true enough, for what strikes one particularly is that, on the whole, native Kansans



A young Carl Becker between two friends, in 1892 or 1893. Courtesy of the Division of Rare and Manuscript Collections, Cornell University Library.

are all so much alike. It is a community of great solidarity, and to the native it is "the Easterner" who appears eccentric.

The conquest of the wilderness in Kansas has thus developed qualities of patience, of calm, stoical, good-humored endurance in the face of natural difficulties, of conformity to what is regarded as necessary. Yet the patience, the calmness, the disposition to conform, is strictly confined to what is regarded as in the natural course. If the Kansan appears stolid, it is only on the surface that he is so. The peculiar conditions of origin and history have infused into the character of the people a certain romantic and sentimental element. Beneath the

placid surface there is something fermenting which is best left alone—a latent energy which trivial events or a resounding phrase may unexpectedly release. In a recent commencement address, Mr. Henry King said that conditions in early Kansas were "*hair-triggered*." Well, Kansans are themselves hair-triggered; slight pressure, if it be of the right sort, sets them off. "Every one is on the *qui vive*, alert, vigilant, like a sentinel at an outpost." This trait finds expression in the romantic devotion of the people to the state, in a certain alert sensitiveness to criticism from outside, above all in the contagious enthusiasm with which they will without warning espouse a cause, especially when symbolized by a striking phrase, and carry it to an issue. Insurgency is native in Kansas, and the political history of the state, like its climate, is replete with surprises that have made it "alternately the reproach and the marvel of mankind." But this apparent instability is only the natural complement of the extreme and confident individualism of the people: having succeeded in overcoming so many obstacles that were unavoidable, they do not doubt their ability to destroy quickly those that seem artificially constructed. It thus happens that while no people endure the reverses of nature with greater fortitude and good humor than the people of Kansas, misfortunes seemingly of man's making arouse in them a veritable passion of resistance; the mere suspicion of injustice, real or fancied exploitation by those who fare sumptuously, the pressure of laws not self-imposed, touch something explosive in their nature that transforms a calm and practical people into excited revolutionists. Grasshoppers elicited only a witticism, but the "mortgage fiends" produced the Populist regime, a kind of religious crusade against the infidel Money Power. The same spirit was recently exhibited in the "Boss Busters" movement, which in one summer spread over the state like a prairie fire and overthrew an established machine supposed to be in control of the railroads. The "Higher Law" is still a force in Kansas. The spirit which refused to obey "bogus laws" is still easily stirred. A people which has endured the

worst of nature's tyrannies, and cheerfully submits to tyrannies self-imposed, is in no mood to suffer hardships that seem remediable.

II

Idealism must always prevail on the frontier, for the frontier, whether geographical or intellectual, offers little hope to those who see things as they are. To venture into the wilderness, one must see it, not as it is, but as it will be. The frontier, being the possession of those only who see its future, is the promised land which cannot be entered save by those who have faith. America, having been such a promised land, is therefore inhabited by men of faith: idealism is ingrained in the character of its people. But as the frontier in America has hitherto been geographical and material, American idealism has necessarily a material basis, and Americans have often been mistakenly called materialists. True, they seem mainly interested in material things. Too often they represent values in terms of money: a man is "worth" so much money; a university is a great university, having the largest endowment of any; a fine building is a building that cost a million dollars, better still, ten millions. Value is extensive rather than intensive or intrinsic. America is the best country because it is the biggest, the wealthiest, the most powerful; its people are the best because they are the freest, the most energetic, the *most* educated. But to see a materialistic temper in all this is to mistake the form for the spirit. The American cares for material things because they represent the substance of things hoped for. He cares less for money than for making money: a fortune is valued, not because it represents ease, but because it represents struggle, achievement, progress. The first skyscraper in any town is nothing in itself, but much as an evidence of growth; it is a white stone on the road to the ultimate goal.

Idealism of this sort is an essential ingredient of the Kansas spirit. In few communities is the word progress more frequently used, or its meaning less frequently detached from a material basis. It

symbolizes the *summum bonum*, having become a kind of dogma. Mistakes are forgiven a man if he is progressive, but to be unprogressive is to be suspect; like Aristotle's non-political animal, the unprogressive is extra-human. This may explain why every Kansan wishes first of all to tell you that he comes from the town of X—, and then that it is the finest town in the state. He does not mean that it is strictly the finest town in the state, as will appear if you take the trouble to inquire a little about the country, its soil, its climate, its rainfall, and about the town itself. For it may chance that he is free to admit that it is hot there, that the soil is inclined to bake when there is no rain, that there is rarely any rain—all of which, however, is nothing to the point, because they are soon to have water by irrigation, which is, after all, much better than rainfall. And then he describes the town, which you have no difficulty in picturing vividly: a single street flanked by nondescript wooden shops; at one end a railroad station, at the other a post-office; side streets lined with frame houses, painted or not, as the case may be; a school house somewhere, and a church with a steeple. It is such a town, to all appearances, as you may see by the hundred anywhere in the west—a dreary place which, you think, the world would willingly let die. But your man is enthusiastic; he can talk of nothing but the town of X—. The secret of his enthusiasm you at last discover in the inevitable "but it will be a great country some day," and it dawns upon you that, after all, the man does not live in the dreary town of X—, but in the great country of *some day*. Such are Kansans. Like St. Augustine, they have their City of God, the idealized Kansas of some day: it is only necessary to have faith in order to possess it.

I cannot illustrate this aspect of Kansas idealism better than by quoting from Mrs. McCormick's little book of personal experience and observation. Having related the long years of struggle of a typical farmer, she imagines the Goddess of Justice revealing to him a picture of "the land as it shall be" when justice prevails:

John beheld a great plain four hundred miles

long and two hundred miles wide—a great agricultural state covered with farmers tilling the soil and with here and there a city or village. On every farm stood a beautiful house handsomely painted outside and elegantly furnished inside, and equipped with all modern conveniences helpful to housekeeping. Brussels carpets covered the floors, upholstered furniture and pianos ornamented the parlors, and the cheerful dining-room had elegant table linen, cut glass, and silverware. Reservoirs carried the water into the houses in the country the same as in the cities. The farmers' wives and daughters, instead of working like slaves without proper utensils or house furnishings, now had everything necessary to lighten work and make home attractive. They had the summer-kitchen, the wash-house, houses for drying clothes, arbors, etc. The door-yards consisted of nicely fenced green lawns, wherein not a pig rooted nor mule browsed on the shrubbery nor hen wallowed in the flower-beds. Shade trees, hammocks, and rustic chairs were scattered about, and everything bespoke comfort. Great barns sheltered the stock. The farms were fenced and subdivided into fields of waving grain and pastures green.

This is what John is supposed to have seen on a summer's day when, at the close of a life of toil, he had just been sold up for debt. What John really saw had perhaps a less feminine coloring; but the picture represents the ideal, if not of an actual Kansas farmer, at least of an actual Kansas woman.

This aspect of American idealism is, however, not peculiar to Kansas: it is more or less characteristic of all western communities. But there is an element in Kansas idealism that marks it off as a state apart. The origin of Kansas must ever be associated with the struggle against slavery. Of this fact, Kansans are well aware. Kansas is not a community of which it can be said, "happy is the people without annals." It is a state with a past. It has a history of which its people are proud, and which they insist, as a matter

of course, upon having taught in the public schools. There are Old Families in Kansas who know their place and keep it—sacred bearers of the traditions of the Kansas Struggle. The Kansas Struggle is for Kansas what the American Revolution is for New England; and while there is as yet no "Society of the Daughters of the Kansas Struggle," there doubtless will be some day. For the Kansas Struggle is regarded as the crucial point in the achievement of human liberty, very much as Macaulay is said to have regarded the Reform Bill as the end for which all history was only a preparation. For all true Kansans, the border wars of the early years have a perennial interest: they mark the spot where Jones shot Smith, direct the attention of the traveler to the little village of Lecompton, or point with pride to some venerable tree bearing honorable scars dating from the Quantrill raid. Whether John Brown was an assassin or a martyr is a question which only a native can safely venture to answer with confidence. Recently, in a list of questions prepared for the examination of teachers in the schools, there appeared the following: "*What was the Andover Band?*" It seems that very few teachers knew what the Andover Band was; some thought it was an iron band, and some a band of Indians. The newspapers took it up, and it was found that, aside from some of the old families, ignorance of the Andover Band was quite general. When it transpired that the Andover Band had to do with the Kansas Struggle, the humiliation of the people was profound.⁸

The belief that Kansas was founded for a cause distinguishes it, in the eyes of its inhabitants, as pre-eminently the home of freedom. It lifts the history of the state out of the commonplace of ordinary westward migration, and gives to the temper of the people a certain elevated and martial

8. The Andover band was a group of young seminarians who pledged to come to Kansas in order to combat slavery. For some discussion of one member of the band, see Scott N. Morse, ed., "'Knowledge is Power': The Reverend Grosvenor Clarke Morse's Thoughts on Free Schools and the Republic During the Civil War," *Kansas History* 31, no. 1 (Spring 2008): 2–13.

quality. The people of Iowa or Nebraska are well enough, but their history has never brought them in touch with cosmic processes. The Pilgrims themselves are felt to have been actuated by less noble and altruistic motives. The Pilgrims, says Thayer, "fled from oppression, and sought in the new world 'freedom to worship God.'" But the Kansas emigrants migrated "to meet, to resist, and to destroy oppression, in vindication of their principles. These were self-sacrificing emigrants, the others were self-seeking. Justice, though tardy in its work, will yet load with the highest honors, the memory of the Kansas pioneers who gave themselves and all they had to the sacred cause of human rights."

This may smack of prejudice, but it is no heresy in Kansas. The trained and disinterested physiocratic historian will tell us that such statements are unsupported by the documents. The documents show, he will say, that the Kansas emigrants, like other emigrants, came for cheap land and in the hope of bettering their condition; the real motive was economic, as all historic motives are; the Kansas emigrant may have thought he was going to Kansas to resist oppression, but in reality he went to take up a farm. At least, that many emigrants thought they came to resist oppression is indisputable. Their descendants still think so. And, after all, perhaps it is important to distinguish those who seek better farms and know they seek nothing else, from those who seek better farms and imagine they are fighting a holy war. When the people of Newtown wished to remove to Connecticut we are told that they advanced three reasons: first, "their want of accommodation for their cattle;" second, "the fruitfulness and commodiousness of Connecticut;" and finally, "*the strong bent of their spirits to remove thither.*" In explaining human history perhaps something should be conceded to "the strong bent of their spirits." Unquestionably cattle must be accommodated, but a belief, even if founded on error, is a fact that may sometimes change the current of history. At all events, the people of Kansas believe that their ancestors were

engaged in a struggle for noble ends, and the belief, whether true or false, has left its impress upon their character. In Kansas the idealism of the geographical frontier has been strongly flavored with the notion that liberty is something more than a by-product of economic processes.

If Kansas idealism is colored by the humanitarian liberalism of the first half of the last century, it has nevertheless been but slightly influenced by the vague, emotional, Jean Paul romanticism of that time. Of all despondent and mystic elements, the Kansas spirit is singularly free. There are few Byrons in Kansas, and no Don Juans. There is plenty of light there, but little of the "light that never was on land or sea." Kansas idealism is not a force that expends itself in academic contemplation of the unattainable. It is an idealism that is immensely concrete and practical, requiring always some definite object upon which to expend itself, but once having such an object expending itself with a restless, nervous energy that is appalling: whatever the object, it is pursued with the enthusiasm, the profound conviction given only to those who have communed with the Absolute. It would seem that preoccupation with the concrete and the practical should develop a keen appreciation of relative values; but in new countries problems of material transformation are so insistent that immediate means acquire the value of ultimate ends. Kansas is a new state, and its inhabitants are so preoccupied with the present, so resolutely detached from the experience of the centuries, that they can compare themselves of to-day only with themselves of yesterday. The idea embodied in the phrase, "*Weltgeschichte ist das Weltgericht*" has slight significance in a community in which twenty years of rapid material improvement has engendered an unquestioning faith in indefinite progress towards perfectibility. In such a community, past and future appear foreshortened, and the latest new mechanical device brings us an appreciable step nearer the millennium, which seems always to be just over the next hill. By some odd mental

alchemy it thus happens that the concrete and the practical have taken on the dignity of the absolute, and the pursuit of a convenience assumes the character of a crusade. Whether it be religion or paving, education or the disposal of garbage that occupies for the moment the focus of attention, the same stirring activity, the same zeal and emotional glow are enlisted: all alike are legitimate objects of conquest, to be measured in terms of their visual and transferable assets, and won by concerted and organized attack. I recall reading in a local Kansas newspaper some time ago a brief comment on the neighboring village of X— (in which was located a small college mistakenly called a university), which ran somewhat as follows: "The University of X— has established a music festival on the same plan as the one at the State University, and with most gratifying results. The first festival was altogether a success. X— is a fine town, one of the best in the state. It has a fine university, and a fine class of people, who have made it a center of culture. X— lacks only one thing; it has no sewers." Perhaps there are people who would find the juxtaposition of culture and sewers somewhat bizarre. But to us in Kansas it does not seem so. Culture and sewers are admittedly good things to possess. Well, then, let us pursue them actively and with absolute conviction. Thus may an idealized sewer become an object worthy to stir the moral depths of any right-minded community.

An insistent, practical idealism of this sort, always busily occupied with concrete problems, is likely to prefer ideas cast in formal mold, will be a little at a loss in the midst of flexible play of mind, and look with suspicion upon the emancipated, the critical, and the speculative spirit. It is too sure of itself to be at home with ideas of uncertain pressure. Knowing that it is right, it wishes only to go ahead. Satisfied with certain conventional premises, it hastens on to the obvious conclusion. It thus happens that Americans, for the most part, are complaisantly satisfied with a purely formal interpretation of those resounding words that symbolize for them the ideas upon which their

institutions are supposed to rest. In this respect Kansas is truly American. Nowhere is there more loyal devotion to such words as liberty, democracy, equality, education. But preoccupation with the concrete fixes the attention upon the word itself, and upon what is traditionally associated with it. Democracy, for example, is traditionally associated with elections, and many of them. Should you maintain that democracy is not necessarily bound up with any particular institution, that it is in the way of being smothered by the complicated blanket ballot, you will not be understood, or, rather, you will be understood only too well as advocating something aristocratic. Democracy is somehow bound up with a concrete thing, and the move for the shorter ballot is therefore undemocratic and un-American. Or, take the word socialism. Your avowed socialist is received politely, and allowed to depart silently and without regret. But if you tell us of the movement for the governmental control of corporate wealth, we grow enthusiastic. The word socialism has a bad odor in Kansas, but the thing itself, by some other name, smells sweet enough.

If one is interested in getting the essential features of socialism adopted in Kansas, or in America itself, the name to conjure with is indeed not socialism, but equality.

III

In a country like America, where there is such confident faith in the individual, one might naturally expect to find the completest toleration, and no disposition to use the government for the purpose of enforcing uniform conditions: logically, it would seem, so much emphasis on liberty should be incompatible with much emphasis on equality. Yet it is precisely in America, and nowhere in America more than in the west, that liberty and equality always go coupled and inseparable in popular speech; where the sense of liberty is especially strong, there also the devotion to equality is a cardinal doctrine. Throughout our history, the west has been a dominant factor in urging the extension of the powers of the national

government, and western states have taken the lead in radical legislation of an equalizing character. This apparent inconsistency strikes one as especially pronounced in Kansas. The doctrine of equality is unquestioned there, and that governments exist for the purpose of securing it is the common belief. "A law against it" is the specific for every malady. The welfare of society is thought to be always superior to that of the individual, and yet no one doubts that perfect liberty is the birthright of every man.

Perhaps the truth is that real toleration is a sentiment foreign to the American temper. Toleration is for the skeptical, being the product of much thought or of great indifference, sometimes, to be sure, a mere *modus vivendi* forced upon a heterogeneous society. In America we imagine ourselves liberal-minded because we tolerate what we have ceased to regard as important. We tolerate religions but not irreligion, and diverse political opinion, but not unpolitical opinion, customs, but not the negation of custom. The Puritans fought for toleration—for themselves. But having won it for themselves, straightway denied it to others. No small part of American history has been a repetition of the Puritan struggle; it has been a fight, not for toleration as a general principle, but for recognition of a civilization resting upon particular principles: in exterior relations, a struggle for recognition of America by Europe; in interior relations, a struggle for recognition of "the West" by "the East." The principle of toleration is written in our constitutions, but not in our minds, for the motive back of the famous guarantees of individual liberty has been recognition of particular opinion rather than toleration of every opinion. And in the nature of the case it must be so. Those who create frontiers and establish new civilizations have too much faith to be tolerant, and are too thoroughgoing idealists to be indifferent. On the frontier conditions are too hazardous for the speculative and the academic to flourish readily: only those who are right and are sure of it can succeed. Certainly it is characteristic of Americans to know that they are right. Certainly they are conscious of having a mission in the world

THE KANSAS FARMER.

Iv'e said it many and many a time—
Said it in prose as I say it in rhyme—
That of every nation, class, or clime,
From Arctic Circle to Torrid Zone—
From peasant-but to imperial throne—
The Kansas Farmer stands forth alone,
Bravest and truest of all the land,
For his craw is full of the stuff called "Sand".

The sharp-toothed mortgage may eat away,
The interest death-watch tick night and day,
And angry creditors howl for pay.
Hot winds may blister, or blizzards beat;
Drought and chinch-bugs may take his wheat;
Or locust-legions may swarm and eat;
Cyclones may twist him, and fag him out—
Spring always finds him up and about.

Ague may shake him, or fever burn;
Politicians cajole or spurn,
The Kansas Farmer "don't care a darn."
The lightning-rod agent and implement man,
With the chattel mortgage fiend in the van,
May fool him and beat him whenever they can—
May get him down, but he gives a flop,
Turns 'em under, and crawls on top

Then he snaps his finger and winks his eye,
Saying, "Look for my smoke in the by and by—
I'll pay what I owe with wheat and rye."
He has faith in the state that nabobs spurn.
He knows bad seasons will take a turn.
His crops will not always drown nor burn,
And honest labor at last will win.
So he takes off his coat and waltzes in.

He hustles away to the fields; again
He plows and harrows and sows his grain,
Trusting in God for the timely rain.
And lo! if the fleet-winged season smile,
That Kansas Farmer rakes his pile,
Pays off his debts and puts on style,
Or he takes the balance of cash in hand,
And buys a section or two of land.

His faith and courage are thing sublime,
For he sticks to the motto every time
"Through obstacles to the stars" we climb.
And that is the reason I always say,
"For the Kansas Farmer Hooray! Hooray!
Weave him garlands of palm and bay,
Grant him honors, and just renown,
The champion's belt, and the victor's crown."

A poem written by W. H. Mellen for the Garnett Kansas Agitator in 1892. This is one expression of the feeling--highlighted by Becker--that Kansans are especially long-suffering, but at the same time, hopeful.

and of having been faithful to it. They have solved great problems hitherto unsolved, have realized utopias dreamed of but never realized by Europe. They are therefore in the van of civilization, quite sure of the direction, triumphantly leading the march towards the ultimate goal. That every one should do as he likes is part of the American creed only in a very limited sense. That it is possible to know what is right, and that what is right should be recognized and adhered to is the more vital belief.

That liberty and equality are compatible terms is, at all events, an unquestioned faith in Kansas. The belief in equality, however, is not so much the belief that all men are equal as the conviction that it is the business of society to establish conditions that will make them so. And this notion, so far from being inconsistent with the pronounced individualism that prevails there, is the natural result of it. In Kansas at least, no one holds to the right of the individual to do as he likes, irrespective of what it is that he likes. Faith in the individual is faith in the particular individual, the true Kansan, who has learned through adversity voluntarily to conform to what is necessary. Human nature, or, at all events, Kansas nature, is essentially good, and if the environment is right all men can measure up to that high level. That the right environment can be created is not doubted. It is not possible for men so aggressive and self-reliant, who have overcome so many obstacles, to doubt their ability to accomplish this also. Having conquered nature, they cheerfully confront the task of transforming human nature. It is precisely because Kansans are such thoroughgoing individualists, so resourceful, so profoundly confident in their own judgments, so emancipated from the past, so accustomed to devising expedients for every new difficulty, that they are unimpressed by the record of the world's failures. They have always thrived on the impossible, and the field of many failures offers a challenge not to be resisted.

To effect these beneficent ends, the people of Kansas turn naturally to the government because they have a very simple and practical idea of

what the government is and what it is for. The government, in Kansas, is no abstract concept. It is nothing German, nothing metaphysical. In this frontier community no one has yet thought of the government as a power not ourselves that makes for evil. Kansans think of the government, as they think of everything else, in terms of the concrete. And why, indeed, should they not? Within the memory of man there was no government in Kansas. They, Kansans, made the government themselves for their own purposes. The government is therefore simply certain men employed by themselves to do certain things; it is the sum of the energy, the good judgment, the resourcefulness of the individuals who originally created it, and who periodically renew it. The government is the individual writ large; in it every Kansan sees himself drawn to larger scale. The passion for controlling all things by law is thus not the turning of the hopeless and discouraged individual to some power other and higher than himself for protection; it is only the instinct to use effectively one of the many resources always at his command for achieving desired ends. Of a government hostile to the individual, they cannot conceive; such a government is a bogus government, and its laws are bogus laws; to resist and overthrow such a government, all the initiative and resourcefulness is enlisted that is devoted to supporting one regarded as legitimate. There is a higher law than the statute book; the law of the state is no law if it does not represent the will of the individual.

To identify the will of the individual with the will of society in this easy fashion, presupposes a certain solidarity in the community: an identity of race, custom, habits, needs; a consensus of opinion in respect to morals and politics. Kansas is such a community. Its people are principally American born, descended from settlers who came mainly from the middle west. It is an agricultural state, and the conditions of life are, or have been until recently, much the same for all. "Within these pastoral boundaries," says ex-Senator Ingalls, in his best Kansas manner, "there are no millionaires nor

any paupers, except such as have been deprived by age, disease, and calamity of the ability to labor. No great fortunes have been brought to the state and none have been accumulated by commerce, manufactures or speculation. No sumptuous mansions nor glittering equipages nor ostentatious display exasperates or allures." And the feeling of solidarity resulting from identity of race and uniformity of custom has been accentuated by the peculiar history of the state. Kansans love each other for the dangers they have passed; a unique experience has created a strong *esprit de corps*—a feeling that while Kansans are different from others, one Kansan is not only as good as any other, but very like any other. The philosophy of numbers, the doctrine of the majority, is therefore ingrained, and little sympathy is wasted on minorities. Rousseau's notion that minorities are only mistaken finds ready acceptance, and the will of the individual is easily identified with the will of society.

And in a sense the doctrine is true enough, for there is little difference of opinion on fundamental questions. In religion there are many creeds and many churches, but the difference between them is regarded as unimportant. There is, however, a quite absolute dogmatism of morality. Baptism is for those who enjoy it, but the moral life is for all. And what constitutes the moral life is well understood: to be honest and pay your debts; to be friendly and charitable, good-humored but not cynical, slow to take offense, but regarding life as profoundly serious; to respect sentiments and harmless prejudices; to revere the conventional great ideas and traditions; to live a sober life and a chaste one,—to these they lay hold without questioning. Likewise in politics. One may be democrat or republican, stalwart or square-dealer, insurgent or stand-patter: it is no vital matter. But no one dreams of denying democracy, the will of the people, the greatest good to the greatest number, equal justice and equal opportunity to all. Whether in respect to politics or economics, education or morals, the consensus of opinion is very nearly perfect: it is an opinion that unites in the deification of the average,

that centers in the dogmatism of the general level.

It goes without saying that the general level in Kansas is thought to be exceptionally high. Kansans do not regard themselves as mere westerners, like Iowans or Nebraskans. Having passed through a superior heat, they are westerners seven times refined. "It is the quality of piety in Kansas," says Mr. E. H. Abbott, "to thank God that you are not as other men are, beer-drinkers, shiftless, habitual lynchers, or even as these Missourians." The pride is natural enough, perhaps, in men whose judgment has been vindicated at last in the face of general skepticism. Having for many years contributed to the gaiety of nations, Kansas has ceased to be the pariah of the states. Kansans have endured Job's comforters too long not to feel a little complaisant when their solemn predictions come to naught. "While envious rivals were jeering, . . . pointing with scorn's slow unmoving finger at the droughts, grasshoppers, hot winds, crop failures, and other calamities of Kansas, the world was suddenly startled and dazzled by her collective display of . . . products at the Centennial at Philadelphia, which received the highest awards." It is inevitable that those who think they have fashioned a cornerstone out of the stone rejected by the builders should regard themselves as superior workmen.

To test others by this high standard is an instinctive procedure. There is an alert attention to the quality of those who enter the state from outside. The crucial question is, are they "our kind of men?" Do they speak "the Kansas language?" Yet the Kansas language is less a form of speech, or the expression of particular ideas, than a certain personal quality. Some time since a distinguished visitor from the east came to the state to deliver a public address. He was most hospitably received, as all visitors are, whether distinguished or otherwise, and his address—permeated with the idealistic liberalism of a half century ago—was attentively listened to and highly praised. But to no purpose all these fine ideas. The great man was found wanting, for there was discovered, among his other impedimenta, a valet. It was a fatal



A studio portrait of Carl Becker taken somewhat later in his career in Ithaca, New York. Courtesy of the Division of Rare and Manuscript Collections, Cornell University Library.

mischance. The poor valet was more commented upon than the address, more observed than his master. The circumstance stamped the misguided man as clearly not our kind of man. Obviously, no man who carries a valet can speak the Kansas language. Needless to say, there are no valets in Kansas.

The feeling of superiority naturally attaching to a chosen people, equally inclines Kansans to dispense readily with the advice or experience of others. They feel that those who have worn the hair shirt cannot be instructed in asceticism by those who wear silk. In discussing the university and its problems with a member of the state legislature, I once hazarded some comparative statistics showing that a number of other states made rather

more liberal appropriations for their universities than the state of Kansas did for hers. I thought the comparison might be enlightening, that the man's pride of state might be touched. Not at all. "I know all about that," he replied. "That argument is used by every man who is interested in larger appropriations for any of the state institutions. But it doesn't go with a Kansas legislature. In Kansas, we don't care much what other states are doing. Kansas always leads, but never follows." And, in fact, the disregard of precedent is almost an article of faith; that a thing has been done before is an indication that it is time to improve upon it. History may teach that men cannot be legislated into the kingdom of heaven. Kansans are not ignorant of the fact, but it is no concern of theirs. The experience of history is not for men with a mission and faith to perform it. Let the uncertain and the timid profit by history; those who have at all times the courage of their emotions will make history, not repeat it. Kansans set their own standards, and the state becomes, as it were, an experiment station in the field of social science.

The passion for equality in Kansas is thus the complement of the individualism and the idealism of its people. It has at the basis of it an altruistic motive, aiming not so much to level all men down as to level all men up. The Kansan's sense of individual worth enables him to believe that no one can be better than he is, while his confident idealism encourages him to hope that none need be worse.

IV

The Kansas spirit is the American spirit double distilled. It is a new grafted product of American individualism, American idealism, American intolerance. Kansas is America in microcosm: as America conceives itself in respect to Europe, so Kansas conceives itself in respect to America. Within its borders, Americanism, pure and undefiled, has a new lease of life. It is the mission of this self-selected people to see to it that it does not perish from off

the earth. The light on the altar, however neglected elsewhere, must ever be replenished in Kansas. If this is provincialism, it is the provincialism of faith rather than of the province. The devotion to the state is devotion to an ideal, not to a territory, and men can say "Dear old Kansas!" because the name symbolizes for them what the motto of the state so well expresses, *ad astra per aspera*.

"Value of the University to the State" by Carl L. Becker

Every year the people of Kansas spend many millions of dollars for the support of free public schools, and every year the state itself appropriates more than a million dollars for what are called the higher institutions of learning—the University, the Agricultural College, the Normal School.⁹ As a general theory no one doubts that it is worth while to do this; in America and especially Kansas, it is an article of our democratic faith that free public schools are the foundation of political and economic liberty. Yet if we ask the concrete question, how, exactly, do these institutions of learning return to the state an equivalent for what they cost, many people find it a little difficult to answer. We Americans are a very practical people, and when we spend a dollar we want to know just how and when it is coming back to us—with perhaps a quarter of a dollar added as interest. It results from this that we are inclined to look with rather a favorable eye upon those studies that are practical, and upon those schools that prepare their students for some particular occupation or profession. It seems good business to spend money for that sort of education which enables those who have it to make money more readily than they could otherwise do. Nearly every one can see at a glance that a law school or an engineering school is a very practical enterprise, because the young man who studies law is thereby enabled to make a living practicing law, and the engineering student can make a living

building bridges. In the same way, a study like chemistry, or journalism, or domestic science, is practical because the knowledge can be practically applied, and exchanged for dollars and cents. But a greater number of studies pursued in our higher institutions, and especially in the University, are not practical in this sense. What we call a "college education," which is what most of the students at the University get, is not practical in this sense.

In any system of public schools, and especially in the higher schools, there never has been educated, and probably never can be educated, more than a very small part of the people; while these schools are open to all alike, only a few are in position to take advantage of the opportunity. The fundamental question to be asked therefore, is this: why should all the people pay money to educate a few of the people? There is only one answer, but it is an obvious one. All the people should pay money to educate a few on the condition, and only on the condition, that the education of these few will sooner or later be a benefit to all the people. This principle is the foundation of all just taxation. We do not expect to pay taxes to support a government if the government is to benefit only a few. Doubtless the government is of direct personal benefit to some individuals, but we do not think that governments are established to provide offices for destitute politicians. The expense of the government is justified only if the government is of more value to all the people than the money they pay to support it. We pay money to support prisons and asylums, to build roads and improve harbors, and for many other things. All these are of direct benefit to some individuals, but they are supported by all the people because we believe them to be beneficial to all the people. All the people of a state in short, form a corporation, a kind of mutual benefit association, the object of which is to establish conditions that will make for what we call civilization, and for a civilization that shall represent a steady improvement in the happiness and welfare of all. Whatever is paid into this mutual benefit association in the form of taxes is justly paid

9. Becker here refers to the institutions that today are the University of Kansas, Kansas State University, and Emporia State University.



Students at the Emporia Kansas State Normal School in 1913. Courtesy of the Kansas Collection at the University of Kansas, call number RH PH P947.1.

only if it is applied to this general object.

In considering the value of our public schools, therefore, we ought not to ask how the education obtained in them benefits the particular individual in the way of making a living. If a law school is of use only because it enables its graduates to charge big fees, it should certainly not be supported by the state. The same is true of any other professional or technical school. I think, however, that a good law school, or a good engineering school, or a good medical school, does much more than that. If we have good law schools we will have lawyers who, whether they make big incomes or small incomes, will work to improve the law, to make justice prevail, and to prevent litigation rather than to foster it. A good medical school might, through the research of one of its professors, discover a remedy for consumption, and if it did so it would be of more value to the state than one which should enable a thousand graduates to charge big fees.

But what of the college, and of the "liberal education" which a college is supposed to give? The questions I hear most frequently from those who complain because so much money is spent for this "unpractical" education are these: What is the college graduate able to do? Is he better able to make a living than before he went to college? Can he make more money in business? Now, these are precisely the sort of questions that should not be asked about the college, or about any other institution of learning supported by the state. For my part, I do not want to pay taxes to enable Mr. A— to make money in business. If the college is worth to the state as much as it costs, it is not because the graduates of the college are able to make more money, but because they will be of more benefit to the state than the money it costs to educate them. How, then, will they confer this benefit? In a general way this benefit will come through the gradual raising of the general level of intelligence. History

shows that progress in civilization is inseparable from progress in intelligence and in thought. But the body of college graduates will benefit the state more particularly by meeting the greatest need which a democratic society has—the need of broad-minded, far-sighted, and honest leaders in all the affairs of society. Lincoln said “You can fool some of the people all of the time and all of the people some of the time, but you cannot fool all of the people all of the time.” This is true, and it is doubtless the final safeguard of democracy. But we cannot suppose that democracy in America will prove very successful if the leaders in public life are to be forever trying to fool the people, and succeed in fooling some of them all of the time and all of them some of the time. Of leaders of this sort we have had enough and to spare. We have some now. We are trying to get rid of them. Without any system of education at all there will always be leaders who are intelligent and who will use their intelligence to fool the people. But the truth is we do not want leaders who try to fool the people; we want leaders who will try not to do so.

The value of our university, our agricultural school, our professional schools, our colleges, therefore is not to enable their graduates to make a good living, or even to make a living at all. Of course they will do this; and education that is worth while ought to enable a man to get on better in the world as it is; but that will be only a secondary consideration. Their real value will be to produce intelligent and honest men and women who will be leaders in the community—leaders in the village, the town, the state, or the nation. Incidentally, it is as important, and in the long run more important, to have intelligent leaders in a small way scattered throughout the country in the villages and towns, and on the farms, than it is to have great leaders in

the nation. The colleges cannot produce a Jefferson or a Lincoln, but they can and do produce every year thousands of men who help to keep the people from being fooled by demagogues. And they will be better able to do this if they have a “liberal education,” an education that concerns itself with knowledge that does not fit one directly for any particular occupation. To be a leader even in a small way one should be able to express oneself well and clearly, should know what is going on in the world, and should have a good idea of how the world, and especially the social and political world, has come to be what it is. It is surely not necessary to prove that a knowledge of languages and the principles of language will help one to express oneself well, or that the study of science, and government and economics, and modern literature is necessary if one would know what is going on in the world, or that the study of history is necessary in order to understand how the society in which we live has come to be what it is, and what are some of the possibilities, and also some of the impossibilities, of progress in the future. Such are the studies of the college, and such studies are “practical” in the long run, and therefore in the highest sense of all.

To all this some one will say: “This is what the college and the university ought to do, but they do not do it.” Doubtless our schools are not all they should be, but that is a poor reason for making them worse than they are. The way to improve our institutions of higher learning is to support them better. And this can be done by all men, in the state and in the schools themselves, giving them their loyal support and confidence, by filling them with the teachers and administrators at whatever cost, and by allowing them perfect freedom to perform the best service for which they exist.^[KH]