

# The Obligations of the 1950 Pollster to the 1984 Historian

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The American Association for Public Opinion Research at its last meeting instituted a Presidential Evening as an occasion on which the Association takes stock of some of its major problems. At Lake Forest, Elmo Roper, upon the invitation of the president, discussed the relation between academic and commercial public opinion research. Then the president discussed the relation between public opinion

research and history. This article is an extended version of his speech including material which, because of limitations of time, could not be presented at Lake Forest.

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THE meetings of the American Association for Public Opinion Research give testimony to the great progress which its members have made in two respects: Our work has shown great technical improvement over the last few years and we have tried to make it ever more useful. Those of us who work at universities, however, often have to meet the criticism that technical excellence and usefulness are not enough. The significance of our work is doubted.

It is not always easy to say exactly what critics mean by lack of significance, but in many of their comments we find them asking that research work be undertaken for other than immediate practical purposes. This "transcendancy" is looked for in at least three directions. Some feel that too much polling work is done for private clients and not enough in the public interest. This is certainly true and many of us wish the availability of funds would make possible a different state of affairs. Others mean that our work does not contribute enough to general theoretical knowledge. In this respect we ourselves have started to improve matters. The program for our meetings this year shows clearly that we are looking more and more on public opinion research as part of an analysis of political behavior on the one hand, and as part of a general theory of opinion formation and decision-making on the other.

But there is at least one more aspect of this quest for significance. This has to do with the choice of specific topics in even the simplest opinion poll. Even if we do not work for a specific client, do we not have a

tendency to ask questions which will make interesting reading in tomorrow's newspapers? Don't we overlook the fact that, in a way, the pollster writes contemporary history? Might not the 1984 historian reproach us for not having given enough thought to what he will want to know about 1950?

Here we might explain why 1984 has been chosen for our title. In the late George Orwell's novel, the hero, Winsten Smith, has grave doubts whether the world of dictatorship and thought police in which he lives is really as wonderful as the tele-screens in every other corner tell him it is. He is consumed by a desire to find out how life looked forty years earlier. But he cannot find out. A Ministry of Truth operating in Orwell's nightmare employs many historians whose sole task it is to change and adapt history to the vacillating needs of the dictator. Old issues of the "London Times" are continuously rewritten so that anyone who wants to consult the past will find that it supports the party line of the day. The despair of not being able to compare the present with the past is one of the most haunting features of Orwell's story.

#### THE HISTORIAN'S ATTITUDE TO ATTITUDES

We all hope that this picture of the future is purely fictional, and that the 1984 historian will not block the citizen of his day from understanding the past. But how much help will he be in 1984 if we do not help him in 1950? Let me begin with a more remote example in which a famous historian was confronted with exactly this problem of explaining the past to his contemporaries.

In the 15th century Machiavelli wrote what is probably one of the first examples of modern and careful analysis of political behavior. And yet, for several centuries afterward, "Machiavellian" stood for everything evil in public affairs. At the beginning of the 19th century a reaction set in, and in 1837, the English historian and statesman, Macaulay, wrote an essay to set the matter straight. He wanted to explain why Machiavelli was so misunderstood. His answer was that "The Prince" was written at a time and in a social setting where people had a very different way of looking at things. His argument runs about as follows: At the end of the Middle Ages the Italian cities had developed a middle class culture of artisans and merchants, while the countries north of the Alps, like England, France, and Germany were still in a barbarous state. In the north, courage was the main means of survival; courage to with-

stand the hardships of life and courage to repel hostile hordes which were incessantly threatening each other with war. In the Italian cities, ingenuity was the most cherished ability; ingenuity in improving the protective value of the community, and ingenuity in meeting the competition of their fellow citizens in an essentially democratic society.

"Hence while courage was a point of honor in other countries ingenuity became the point of honor in Italy."

The pertinence of this passage to Macaulay's main topic is obvious. He feels that a great thinker living in what we today would call "an ingenuity culture" was judged by people who lived and are still living in the aftermath of a "courage culture."

From our point of view it is important to see what evidence Macaulay tried to adduce for his thesis. The great English historian struggles hard to make his point clear and convincing to his reader. First of all he compares an English and an Italian hero. Henry V was admired by the English because he won a great battle, in spite of his personal crudeness and cruelty. Francis Sforza was admired by the Italians because he was a successful statesman, in spite of his personal treachery and faithlessness.

And still, Macaulay is not yet quite sure that the reader has seen the matter clearly. He finally hits upon what seems to him a useful literary device, and what today we can consider probably the first projective test recorded in the literature. He writes:

"We have illustrated our meaning by an instance taken from history. We will select another from fiction. Othello murders his wife; he gives orders for the murder of his lieutenant; he ends by murdering himself. *Yet he never loses the esteem and affection of Northern readers.* His intrepid and ardent spirit redeems everything. The unsuspecting confidence with which he listens to his adviser, the agony with which he shrinks from the thought of shame, the tempest of passion with which he commits his crimes, and the haughty fearlessness with which he avows them, give an extraordinary interest to his character. Iago, on the contrary, is the object of universal loathing. . . . *Now we suspect that an Italian audience in the fifteenth century would have felt very differently.* Othello would have inspired nothing but detestation and contempt. The folly with which he trusts the friendly professions of a man whose promotion he had obstructed,

the credulity with which he takes unsupported assertions, and trivial circumstances, for unanswerable proofs, the violence with which he silences the exculpation till the exculpation can only aggravate his misery, would have excited the abhorrence and disgust of the spectators. The conduct of Iago they would assuredly have condemned; but they would have condemned it as we condemn that of his victim. Something of interest and respect would have mingled with their disapprobation. The readiness of the traitor's wit, the clearness of his judgment, the skill with which he penetrates the dispositions of others and conceals his own, would have ensured to him a certain portion of their esteem."

It is clear what Macaulay is striving for. He wishes someone had conducted attitude studies in Florence and in London of the 15th century. Let us suppose that a polling agency existed at the time, and was hired by Macaulay to test his hypothesis. In a somewhat facetious way, we can imagine how they might have proceeded. The Othello story could have been written up in one or two paragraphs, without giving either Othello or Iago any advantage. Pretests could have been conducted to make sure that the wording was quite unbiased. (Perhaps they might have concealed the fact that Othello was a Negro because that might bias some respondents.) The crucial question would have been: How many Florentines and Londoners, respectively, approve of Iago, how many of Othello, and how many say "don't know"? Nothing less, but hardly much more, would have been needed to provide empirical evidence for Macaulay's brilliant conjecture.

Few historians will make such elaborate efforts to document their statements about public attitudes. It is much more likely that we shall find statements which read like a Gallup release, except, of course, that the tables are missing. Take, for instance, the following account from Merle Curti's, "The Thrust of the Civil War into Intellectual Life."

"A growing number of men and women in both sections, distrustful of their leaders, sympathetic with the enemy, or merely war-weary, preferred compromise or even defeat to the continuation of the struggle. The fact of war affected the thinking not only of these dissidents but of the great majority of people who accepted it as inevitable and hoped that good would come from it."

Here are all the ingredients of a statement on the distribution of attitudes. We find quantitative statements like "a growing number" or "the great majority of people." There are suggestions for comparisons between men and women and between different sections of the country. The passage which we have quoted even implies certain cross-tabulations between attitudes towards the war and attitudes toward other issues of the day.

No wonder, then, that the historians of a later period for which polls were already available would eagerly incorporate them into their writings. Dixon Wecter writes about "The Age of the Great Depression." At one point he discusses the growing acceptance of birth control. To document this trend, he first uses the traditional, indirect methods of the historian, trying to derive attitudes from their manifestations. He points to the change in terms, from "race suicide" to "birth control" and finally to "planned parenthood." Then he goes at his topic more directly.

"A poll among Farm and Fireside readers early in the Depression showed two to one for giving medical advice on planned parenthood, and during the thirties the Sears, Roebuck catalogue began to list contraceptive wares. A straw vote of subscribers by the Protestant Churchman in January, 1935, revealed almost unanimous approval for birth control, while in the next year, among all sorts and conditions, a Gallup poll agreed with a Fortune survey in finding two out of three favorable. This majority, moreover, rose steadily in later years, with women outranking men in the warmth of their indorsement."

We could cite other similar examples to show further the place of attitude and opinion research in historical studies; but it might suffice instead to point out that some of the most enduring works of historiography, such as Taylor's "The Medieval Mind" and Weber's "The Protestant Ethic," are those which dealt with the attitudes, value systems, and prevailing beliefs of the period. By the historian's own testimony, there is a place for attitude and opinion research in their field, but this still leaves open the question of what kind of polling data the future historian will need. How can we fit at least some of our findings into the stream of intellectual work as it extends into the future?

We can expect guidance from three directions. For one, we can study historical writings; secondly, we can turn to certain works on the con-

temporary scene; finally, we can scrutinize existing speculations on the probable course of the future. It should be helpful to illustrate briefly each of these points.

#### THE POLLSTER READS A BOOK

It would be worthwhile for a scholar to review typical historical texts from our point of view. Where do competent writers show, either explicitly or implicitly, the need for attitude material of the kind a sampling survey can furnish? Short of a careful scrutiny we cannot know the prevailing modes of analysis. Furthermore, the specific need for opinion data will vary according to the topic under investigation. But a few expectations are rather obvious.

In at least three areas the historian will be confronted with the need for opinion data. The most obvious, of course, is when "prevailing values" are themselves the object of his study. There are a number of classical investigations of major changes in the climate of opinion such as the transition from medieval traditionalism to the individualistic thinking connected with the Protestant Reformation. During the first half of the 19th century a countertrend started, stressing public responsibility for individual welfare. This trend could be observed in the United States as well as in other countries. Curti, for instance, points out that, before the Civil War, there was considerable resistance against accepting tax supported public schools.

"Men of power and substance frequently argued that education had been, and properly so, a family matter. . . . What could be more potent than the certainty that if free schools were granted, the concession would not end short of socialism itself? To provide free schooling for the less well-to-do would result in the loss of their self-respect and initiative."

Today, hardly anyone feels this way. But how did this shift of public opinion come about? Among which groups did it start and how did it spread? How long did it take for the initial resistance to disappear? What external events precipitated or retarded the development?

Such knowledge would be of considerable practical importance today. If we substituted the words "housing" for "schooling" in the preceding quotation, we would describe the way in which many people feel about public housing projects. It is probable that this sentiment is now in the process of historical change. So far as public health insurance is con-

cerned, the resistance is still very great. More detailed knowledge of such developments in the past would help us to predict better what turn our contemporary problems are likely to take. If we know better the patterns of past change, we can perhaps extract from them some recurrent paths of development. Therefore, incidentally, we can expect that those historians who look at history as one sector of a general social science will be most likely to welcome attitude data.

This leads to a second area in which the historian would undoubtedly need public opinion data. Wherever a new type of institution or a major legislative development was investigated, he would be greatly helped by data on the interaction between the diffusion of attitudes and the sequence of social actions. One of the most thoroughly investigated phenomena of this kind is the turn from *laissez-faire* to social legislation, which took place in England during the second half of the 19th century. Karl Polanyi has pointed out that the free market system never really worked well in any event. He summarizes Dicey's famous investigation of "Law and Public Opinion in England" in the following way:

"Dicey made it his task to inquire into the origins of the 'anti-laissez-faire' or, as he called it, the 'collectivist' trend in English public opinion, the existence of which was manifest since the late 1860's. He was surprised to find that no evidence of the existence of such a trend could be traced save the acts of legislation themselves. More exactly, no evidence of a 'collectivist trend' in public opinion prior to the laws which appeared to represent such a trend could be found."

Here is a challenging suggestion that major legislative events may not be preceded, but rather followed, by changes in public opinion. Before one could accept such a conclusion one would certainly want to know how safe it is to make inferences of this kind merely by examining newspapers, pamphlets and recorded speeches. Could it not be the case that there was an undercurrent of public opinion in the direction of social legislation which did not find expression in the kind of material available to the historian, but which would have been caught by systematic public opinion research at the time?

A third area of overlap between the historian and the pollster ought to be those writings in which specific events are to be explained. There is virtually no American historian, for example, who has not tried at one time or another to explain the outcome of some presidential elec-

tion. Robert Bower has collected a whole folklore of stories which have arisen in connection with elections of major importance, such as those of 1840, 1882, and 1896. He analyzes these explanations of election outcomes and shows that all of them imply the type of knowledge about issues and personalities of the day which might have been obtained through polls. Even with poll data it is not easy to arrive at safe conclusions. This is known by everyone who followed the efforts to understand Truman's election in 1948. Bower's "Opinion Research and Historical Interpretation of Elections" shows how much more tenuous the conjectures are for previous periods.

Historians themselves are, of course, aware of this task. A group of medievalists started, in their professional journal, "Speculum," to appraise the status of their work. The first article, by J. L. LaMonte, was called "Some Problems in Crusading Historiography." It was of interest to read there that "the decline of the crusading ideal in spite of papal propaganda is a little known subject." One is reminded of the studies of returning veterans reported in "The American Soldier" when the author deplores how little is known about "the social effects of the change in material status of such crusaders as returned after considerably bettering their position in the East."

In such a reappraisal of historical writings, we should be sensitive to the effect which opinion surveys have had in changing the notion of a "fact." There was a time when only political documents found in archives were considered appropriate evidence for the historian. That made him focus on political events; everything else was interpretation. Then the "new history" centered attention on data such as economic and social statistics. This enlarged considerably the area of what were considered facts. Still, sentiments and attitudes remained a matter of interpretation. Now, however, they too have become facts. The result of a public opinion poll is as much a fact as the content of a political document or the crop and price statistics of a certain region.

In turn, the term "attitude and opinion research" should not be taken too narrowly. Let us remember that we have always known and discussed among ourselves that much more than simple "yes-no" questions belongs in our equipment. In connection with the historian's problem, two techniques in particular will certainly need considerable refinement on our part. One derives from the problem of saliency. The fact that a respondent answers a question which we put to him still does



not tell us whether he would have asked himself this question or whether the matter is of particular concern to him. The historian will certainly want to know what issues were in the foreground of attention at various times and in various sectors of the population. Published polling material does not contain enough of such information; as a matter of fact, considerable methodological progress on this point is still needed. The diffusion of opinion in time and social space is a second problem which we do not yet handle with enough emphasis or enough technical skill. In many more of our surveys we should find out where people get their ideas and how they pass them on. All of this has thus far been a matter of conjecture for the historian; we are supposed to turn it into an enlarged array of "facts." Thus the study of historical writings will not only be a source of significant topics; it could also be a spur for methodological improvements.

#### SIGNS OF THE TIMES

A second source of ideas, interesting hypotheses and leads for significant field surveys may be found in many efforts to understand the meaning of what is going on around us right now. It has been said that each generation must rewrite history, because hitherto unconsidered aspects of the past become interesting in the light of the changing present. But there is certainly a limitation to this rule. If there is no data at all on certain aspects of the past, not much can be done, even under the impetus of a strong new curiosity. The pollster as a contemporary historian thus takes on considerable importance. What he considers worthy of a survey will, in later years, influence the range of possible historical inquiries.

Therefore, the question of where the pollster can get leads for significant investigations is an important one. Again, we cannot exhaust the possible choices, but a few clear avenues suggest themselves at the moment. There is, first, the critic of the contemporary scene. There are always social commentators who are especially sensitive to the shortcomings of our times; it is not unlikely that they hit on topics about which the future historian will want to know more. Let us quote passages which are characteristic of the type of statement we have in mind.

"Much too early do young people get excited and tense, much too early are they drawn away by the accelerated pace of the times. People

admire wealth and velocity. Everybody strives for them. . . . Here they compete, here they surpass each other, with the result that they persevere in mediocrity. And this is the result of the general trend of the contemporary world toward an average civilization, common to all."

We can visualize translating this social comment into a research program. It would not be too difficult to develop an index of competitiveness, and to study at what age individuals exhibit a marked increase in their average scores. But that would not be enough. We are also called upon to follow the consequences of such developments for broader areas of society; for "not the external and physical alone is now managed by machinery, but the internal and spiritual also. . . ."

"Has any man, or any society of men, a truth to speak, a piece of spiritual work to do, they can nowise proceed at once and with the mere natural organs, but must first call a public meeting, appoint committees, issue prospectuses, eat a public dinner; in a word, construct or borrow machinery, wherewith to speak it and do it. Without machinery they were hopeless, helpless. . . ."

Here a more sociological type of data is required; number and types of meetings, attendance figures, etc. Most of all we will want to study the statistical interrelationship between attitudes and kinds of social participation in intellectual enterprises.

Most interesting about these quotations, however, are their dates and their sources. The first is from a letter which Goethe wrote in 1825. The second is a characteristic portion of an essay written by Carlyle in 1830. Here are two leading minds in two different countries voicing the same apprehension in terms which might well be used today. Undoubtedly experts could provide us with similar statements for any other century, for we are always likely to find evidence of a feeling that matters were very different sometime ago. There are certain standbys which recur in many discussions: the tensions of daily living have become so much worse; people are now more apathetic politically than they were previously; the cultural taste of the country has been depraved. We shall not be able to decide the truth of such issues in retrospect, but we can at least lay the ground for more responsible discussion of the problem in the future.

The social critic will focus our attention primarily on certain contents and subject matters which are important for our times. There is another group of analysts who are more concerned with the kinds of dimensions which are useful in describing the social scene. They are likely to be interested mainly in comparisons between various countries, for instance, or between different social groups. It should never be forgotten how difficult it is to make the social scene "visible." When we deal with nature, many objects, like trees or stones or animals, force themselves on us visually. Social entities are much more the product of creative intelligence. The notion of a clique, for instance, or of a reference group, the inner gallery for which so many of us play the drama of our lives, or the distinction between an introverted and an extroverted personality are real conceptual inventions. In social observations we are often in the position of a bird which flies across the sky with a flock of other birds. For the external observer, the flock has a clearly visible geometric shape; but does the bird within the flock even know about the shape of his "group"? By what social interrelations among the birds is the form of the group maintained?

When we translate these sketchy considerations into problems of survey research, we meet them in a familiar form. Every self-respecting pollster will report his findings nowadays "sub-classified by age, sex, and socio-economic status." We know from our findings that these are useful classifications. But are they the most significant ones? Wouldn't we be helped in the work of today, and wouldn't we help readers of the future if we were alert to additional variables according to which we might classify our samples and analyze our findings?

It is on such an issue that we can get guidance from writers who have tried to obtain the best possible view of the contemporary scene. Let us turn for a moment to the patron saint of modern public opinion research, James Bryce. He makes an effort at one point to compare the political scene in England and that prevailing in this country. To this end he distinguishes "three sets of persons, those who make opinion, those who receive and hold opinion, those who have no opinions at all." After elaborating on this distinction, he comes to the conclusion that the first group is somewhat larger in England than in the United States of 1870, while the proportion in the second group is very much larger on the American continent than in Britain. From this he draws a number of interesting conclusions. The "power of public opinion in the United

States," for instance, seems to him related to the inordinately large ratio of opinion holders to opinion makers.

To find significant variables for political classifications continues to be a challenge for writers of this kind. It is quite possible that an index of political participation and interest might prove a useful instrument for a great variety of surveys, on a national as well as on an international scale. As a matter of fact, some research organizations are reported to be working on the development of just such devices.

In the writings of contemporary social scientists, the pollster will find other classificatory suggestions which are worth pursuing. David Riesman, for instance, has just published a book centered on the distinction between three types of social character. One is the tradition-directed type; the person who behaves as he thinks his social group expects him to, does not believe he should change anything in his environment, and feels shame if he violates any of the rules under which he lives. The second is the inner-directed type; the person who is guided by strong moral standards, has a kind of psychological gyroscope which controls his conduct, and who feels guilt if he does something which is not right. Finally, there is the outer-directed type; the backslapper who wants to get along with everyone, who has few convictions of his own, and who feels general anxiety if he is not successful in receiving all the signals which he tries to catch on his psychological radar system. In chapter after chapter of "The Lonely Crowd" Riesman tries to spell out the political correlates of these three types. He is especially interested in the outer-directed type, which he considers characteristic of modern American life. Riesman discovers in him a dangerous kind of political apathy. He wants to get all the inside dope on politics just as on baseball, but he has lost all belief that he, individually, has any influence and therefore refrains from giving public affairs any serious thought or any active devotion. A careful reading of Riesman's chapters on politics will show how much empirical research could and should be geared in with such speculations.

Finally, the literature of the so-called cultural anthropologists belongs here. They are not only concerned with singling out significant topics or finding variables which would be useful to make more clearly visible the main character of the contemporary scene. They also want to uncover the mechanisms by which the scene develops. Distinguished equally by brilliance and by irresponsibility of factual evidence, they

challenge the pollster to try to bring about effective cooperation. But the challenge is worth accepting, for from an interaction between the two groups could develop really new insights into human affairs. No newspaper reader can be unaware of the writings on "national character." The main thesis is that each society and each national sub-group develops its own way of looking at the world, and its own way of giving satisfaction to basic needs. It is the function of the family to raise children in such a way that they "want to act in the way they have to act as members of the society or as a special class within it." Like a group of expert ball players giving a public exhibition, the anthropologists toss their variations on the basic theme from one to the other. Margaret Mead describes in great detail the small American family with its lack of tradition and its uncertain goals in a quickly changing world:

"... while the child is learning that his whole place in the world, his name, his right to the respect of other children—everything—depends upon his parents . . . he also learns that his own acceptance by these parents, who are his only support, is conditional upon his achievements, upon the way in which he shows up against other children and against their idea of other children."

Gorer picks it up from Mead. He agrees with her that there is a strong element of uncertainty in the emotional life of the American family. The parents do not quite know what is right and therefore can love their children only if they are successful in their own peer group, the school class or the gang. But Gorer does not think that ambition or success drive develops in children as a result; he has a different notion:

"The presence, the attention, the admiration of other people thus becomes for Americans a necessary component to their self-esteem, demanded with a feeling of far greater psychological urgency than is usual in other countries. . . . The most satisfying form of this assurance is not given by direct flattery or commendation (this by itself is suspect as a device to exploit the other) but by love."

The two writers, if confronted with their statements, would probably say that there is a strong relation between ambition and the desire to be loved. Yet how do they know that these desires are more frequent or more intense among Americans than among other people? They give many examples from Rotary meetings and from double dates in colleges which make their idea plausible. We pollsters are accustomed to asking

for a better definition of terms and for more precise evidence; so we are inclined to criticize these anthropologists. But are we fully justified? Have they not seen here topics which are considerably more worthy of investigation than the rating of movie stars or even the attitudes of voters toward a local candidate?

Here are writers who have challenging ideas on the structure of our social relationships and their effect on attitudes and opinions. Does this not suggest that we have neglected the first link in this chain? To cite one specific example. In the writings of the social anthropologists, the authoritarian structure of the family plays a large role. Who among us, either in this country or abroad, has collected answers to questions like these: To what extent do young people make their own occupational choices and to what extent do their parents influence their decisions? In what countries and in what groups does a young suitor still ask the girl's parents for consent to marriage? How are conflicts between father and son resolved when they both want the car or both want to use the living room? Where do children still spend their holidays with their families, and where do they go off on their own? How much visiting of relatives is there, how frequent are family reunions, and so on? What would adolescents consider the main complaints as to the way they are treated by their parents? What activities are parents most eager to forbid in their young children and what principles are they most anxious to inculcate in their older ones?

Useful contributions along such lines could be made, especially by those among us who conduct international polls. But in this discussion we are not interested in the present for its own sake; we want to look at it from the point of view of tomorrow. What should we watch as the present slowly turns into the future?

#### GLANCING INTO THE FUTURE

Scrutinizing writings on the past will give us an idea of the kinds of data which historians have missed prior to the appearance of the pollster on the scene. Studying the literature on present-day society will give us a chance to confront theoretical thinking with empirical data. A final, and probably the most important, possibility develops when we make efforts to guess what the future will want to know about today. Quite a number of political scientists feel that the best way to study

the present is to see it as a transitional stage to future events. Harold Lasswell has emphasized the need of "developmental constructs."

"In the practice of social science, . . . we are bound to be affected in some degree by our conceptions of future development. . . . What is the function of this picture for scientists? It is to stimulate the individual specialist to clarify for himself his expectations about the future, as a guide to the timing of scientific work."

We should form expectations of what major changes might come about within the next decades. It is in connection with these changing conditions that the historian will expect that we, today, have initiated a series of trend studies. This is undoubtedly the most difficult task. It not only requires of us pollsters that we translate more or less vague ideas into specific instruments of inquiry; there is so little thinking along this line that we shall even have to assume some responsibility for guessing what will be of importance a few decades hence. The best we can do in the present context is to give a few examples of the kind of effort which will be required.

There can be little doubt that the history of the next decades will be centered around the effects of the rapidly increasing industrialization characteristic of our times. Perhaps the reaction to contemporary mechanization will be found in strong religious movements. If this is the case, what will the future analyst, in retrospect, wish that we had ascertained today? An interesting lead for this is found in "The American Soldier." The importance of this work lies in the fact that, for the first time, we really know something about the experiences and feelings of an important sector of the population. As far as religion goes, the following observation is reported. About three-fourths of the soldiers said that prayer was a source of strength in battle, but the minority who did not find this so had certain interesting characteristics: they experienced less fear, laid more stress on their relations with other soldiers, and seemed, in general, to be what modern psychologists would call better adjusted personalities.

Here, in one result, may lie the seeds of an important bifurcation. Increasing industrialization may lead to a compensatory dependence on religious beliefs. Or, it may create a new type of personality, differently adjusted to new social demands. We cannot tell in which direction the future will tend; as a matter of fact, we do not even know whether any



really new developments will take place in the religious sphere; but general considerations and bits of research evidence seem to indicate that systematic work is called for.

At the same time that we try to answer these more general questions about the intensity of religious beliefs, we should analyze the specific character of religious movements as they develop. In this connection Aldous Huxley has provided an impressive set of predictions. In his essay on "Religion as an Objective Problem," he distinguishes between the "old" religion and the "new." According to him, the old one developed as a result of fear and ignorance of the external physical environment. Modern science has given us enough insight into and control over the forces of nature so that religious beliefs as we have known them so far are likely to fade away slowly. Now we are faced with a new set of problems emerging from what he calls the "internal environment"; the disorganization of our economic and social life, war, poverty, and unemployment. New religious movements are likely to develop, centered less around the worship of a supernatural being than around the worship of a single solution for social evils.

"The process, of course, has already begun. Many observers have commented on the religious elements in Russian communism—the fanaticism, the insistence on orthodoxy, the violent 'theological' disputes, the 'worship' of Lenin, the spirit of self-dedication, the persecutions, the common enthusiasm, the puritan element, the mass-emotions, the censorship."

The new religion is now in its most primitive form, with Communism and Fascism as typical examples. But just as the old religion moved from simple paganism to a refined monotheism, so will the new religion outgrow its present crudeness.

"Accordingly, we can prophesy that in the long run the nationalistic element in socialized religion will be subordinated or adjusted to the internationalist: that the persecution of minorities will give place to toleration; that the subtler intellectual and moral virtues will find a place and will gradually oust the cruder from their present pre-eminence in the religiously-conceived social organism. We can also assert with fair assurance that this process of improvement will be a slow one, and accompanied by much violence and suffering."



Here, indeed, is a research program. First we must find appropriate indices for the various shades of belief which Huxley distinguishes. Then we shall want to get our information separately from a large number of social subgroups. Trend data will have to be assembled over a long period of time; and wherever possible, these trends should be linked with external events. If a special movement starts somewhere, if a related book becomes a best-seller, if some special legislation is passed or a voluntary association established, we shall want to study the pertinent attitudes "before and after."

This is not the place to propose a concrete study design, but we should warn against oversimplifying the whole problem. The attitudes in which the historian will be interested are certainly complex in nature; and, in order to cover one single concept, it may be necessary to employ a whole set of interlocking questions. As a matter of fact, it might very well be that future trends will be different for different dimensions of the same notion. To exemplify what this means in terms of our work, we shall choose for our second example the problem of class tensions.

There is an abundance of prophecies in the literature which can be loosely labelled as Marxist. Conflicts of interest between the working class and the influential business groups will become more acute. The workers will become more class conscious, and more aggressive towards the privileged groups. The latter, in turn, will defend more strongly their class interests and more and more neglect the democratic forms of politics. These ideas are too well known to need further elaboration. Instead, let us pick out of this whole complex the notion of class consciousness, and see whether we can develop a kind of barometer by which to measure trends in the next few decades.

In recent years, a large number of business companies have conducted surveys to determine their standing with the public, but this by no means meets the task. There could very easily be an intensification of class consciousness among workers which does not express itself immediately in invectives directed toward General Motors or Standard Oil. Not even the recently increased interest of social psychologists in this problem covers it fully. Richard Centers, in his "The Psychology of Social Classes," has developed a set of questions pertinent to two elements: readiness to accept the government as an agent in economic affairs; and a feeling that avenues of economic advancement are closing up, that social rewards are not fairly distributed.

The total picture has many additional aspects, however. We should study whether workers have a feeling of identification with their class. If a worker's son becomes a lawyer, should he work for a union rather than for a big corporation? Is there an increased interest in reading stories about workers rather than about movie stars? Is there an increased interest in leisure-time associations especially designed for workers? Another aspect of the problem would be whether workers are concerned with the power structure in the community. Do they think that the courts handle poor and rich alike? Do and can the councilmen in the city represent both poor and rich? Do they feel that the rich have special influence with the police? Even if there is growing uneasiness on this score, the question still to be raised is whether it is channeled into political reactions. Does "going into politics" become a more respected and desirable pursuit? Is voting the "right" way something which becomes an important criterion for judging people? Do political issues become a factor in one's own personal plans?

This example, incidentally, raises a serious problem of strategy for the pollster. Topics relevant to the work of the future historian are likely to come from the area of social change. Polls dealing with such areas can easily become suspect as "subversive" or "inflammatory." It will therefore be important to make clear, both to the general public and to specific clients, that the public opinion researcher is not taking sides when he focuses part of his attention on more unconventional issues. As a matter of fact, it might very well be that some of the work suggested here might best be done under the joint sponsorship of several agencies or perhaps under the aegis of a professional organization like the American Association for Public Opinion Research.

#### WHAT SHOULD BE DONE?

We pollsters cannot be expected to tackle the whole problem by ourselves. We should seek the assistance of a "commission for the utilization of polls in the service of future historiography," whose specific task it would be to furnish us with appropriate ideas. This commission should consist, on the one hand, of historians and other social scientists who have given thought to questions such as those we have raised, and, on the other hand, of research technicians who can translate research suggestions into actual study designs.

There certainly will be no scarcity of topics. There is much evidence to show that people in this country were inclined to shy away from con-

cern with international relations. Suddenly we are thrust into the position of being the leading power in the world. How will people in this country adjust to this change, and what will be the mutual interaction between the distribution of attitudes and the actions of our policy-makers? At what rate will Americans really become aware of the existence of the Far Eastern people? When will they notice that the famous destruction of the "human race" by the atomic bomb might really mean the replacing of the Western sector of humanity by their Asiatic fellow men? Another element of our tradition is the belief that one man is as good as another. But in a society which becomes ever more complex, the expert plays an increasingly important role. How will this proverbial anti-authoritarian tradition adjust to the increasing, and probably unavoidable, "bureaucratization" of the modern world? Or one might turn from the political to a more personal sphere. Increasing amounts of available leisure time will force more people to review their "designs for living." How will they use the time over which they themselves have control: will they use it to have a richer personal life, to equip themselves better for competitive advancement, or will they just fritter it away? There is certainly an obvious interrelation between these questions and new technical developments such as television.

Whatever topic we select, the procedure for research will always be the same. We must first formulate clearly a number of alternative assumptions about future developments. Then we must decide on the kind of indices which are pertinent for the problem at hand; this is where the research technician can make his main contribution. To set up the machinery for collecting the data is a matter of decision and funds. As to the selection of respondents, a certain flexibility will be necessary. For some problems a national cross-section will be most appropriate. For other problems very specific population groups will have to be sampled. When it comes to studying the diffusion of attitudes, attention will have to be focused on elite groups. In other cases specific occupations or special age groups will command our interest. And at all times we shall want to collect "background information": documentation on major events, on the activities of organizations, community leaders, etc.

At this point, we should warn against a possible misunderstanding. Previously we stressed that attitude surveys provide a new type of "facts"

for the historian. But this does not imply that they are more important than the more traditional kind of data. It is just the interplay between the "objective" facts and attitudes which promises a great advance in historiography. If for a given period we not only know the standard of living, but also the distribution of ratings on happiness and personal adjustment, the dynamics of social change will be much better understood. Let us add that sampling surveys will enlarge our ideas on social bookkeeping in still another way. Nothing is more characteristic of this trend than what has happened in the decennial census of the United States. As long as we thought only in terms of complete enumerations, we could afford to include only a few questions. Now that we use five percent and one percent samples on specific items, we are able to cover a much wider range of topics. This is undoubtedly only a beginning. Since small sample designs have been perfected, there is no reason why sociology should not develop on a much broader scale. Cultural activities and other living habits may soon be added to the more conventional trends in the birth rate or export trade. It is certainly no coincidence that the Kinsey reports did not begin to appear before 1948.

As early as 1908, in his "Human Nature in Politics," Graham Wallas pointed to such changes in what he called the methods of political reasoning. He compared the reports of two Royal Commissions, both of which were concerned with the reform of the English poor laws. One was established in 1834 and the other in 1905. The earlier one dealt with "a priori deduction, illustrated, but not proved by particular instances." Now (in 1905) things are different.

"Instead of assuming half consciously that human energy is dependent solely on the working of the human will in the presence of the ideas of pleasure and pain, the Commissioners are forced to tabulate and consider innumerable quantitative observations relating to the very many factors affecting the will of paupers and possible paupers. They cannot, for instance, avoid the task of estimating the relative industrial effectiveness of health, which depends upon decent surroundings; of hope, which may be made possible by State provision for old age; and of the imaginative range which is the result of education; and of comparing all these with the 'purely economic' motive created by ideas of future pleasure and pain."

As can be seen, Wallas did not want to replace, but to complement, principles with social surveys. And so we too do not suggest that attitude data are better than "hard" facts, but that they add, so to speak, a new dimension.

There is one more suggestion for the work of the new commission on polling and historiography. We are all aware that prediction is one of the touchstones by which a science can justify itself. So far our predictions have been confined mainly to the outcomes of political elections; many have felt that this is a rather insignificant pursuit. There is no reason, however, that we should not predict future sentiments and then, later on, study whether we were right. One of the most impressive chapters in "The American Soldier" is that on "The Aftermath of Hostilities." In the summer of 1944, the Research Branch prepared a document predicting what attitudes they expected among soldiers at the end of the war. In 1945, many of those predictions were tested: At some points the predictions were correct, and at others, wrong. But no person reading this chapter can escape the feeling that here might be the substitute for laboratory experiments, so often impossible to carry out in the social sciences. Interestingly enough, without knowing about the experience of the Research Branch, an historian, Helen Lynd, saw this very link between her field and ours. In writing about "The Nature of Historical Objectivity," she stated:

"... we know surely ... that the future which lies ahead will become present, and that hypotheses which we may now make can be tested by the course of events. If we are in earnest about historical objectivity, why do we not more often frame precise hypotheses about what may be the course of events in a given area in a given time? ... With all that can be said against the recent opinion polls in this country there is this to be said in their favor: they at least made their errors public so that they could be subject to the verification of events."

It is somewhat faint praise to say that we at least make our errors public. We deserve better. But it might be our own mistake that many people are not aware of the many implications inherent in our work. Public opinion research has the unique opportunity to increase self-awareness in the community, a self-awareness which is an important factor in individual as well as in collective health. The great contribution of modern psychoanalysis is that it has given us more understand-

ing of what is going on in ourselves. Public opinion research can do the same for the larger community if it becomes more aware of its potentialities and more eager to develop them. We want all of our intelligent fellow citizens to have respect for the kind of work we are doing. One very good way to get this respect is for us to show that we recognize our common problems and can contribute to their clarification.