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The Great Inquiry into National Character

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Of all the books that no one can write, those about nations and national character are the most impossible.

- Jacques Barzun, 1943 [1]

Like an impressionist painting, national character appears when a body of countrymen are viewed from an appropriate distance.

- Don Martindale, 1967 [2]

Clever people among today's intelligentsia disdain the very idea that there is such a thing as "national character."

- Thomas Sowell, 2009 [3]

Stereotypes about national character—a generalization about an ethnic group's enduring qualities—may seem to be the stuff of idle cocktail-party chatter, the observations of jaundiced hotel keepers, or the superficial impressions of travelers, but they are much more. Indeed, a long and impressive tradition of elite politicians, intellectuals, and social scientists have opined on this topic. These include political leaders of the United States (Theodore Roosevelt) [4], United Kingdom (Stanley Baldwin, John Major, David Cameron), [5] France (Georges Clemenceau), [6] Germany (Otto von Bismarck, Adolf Hitler), [7] India (Narendra Modi), [8] China (Hu Jintao), [9] Indonesia (Joko Widodo), and [10] Japan (Tsutomu Hata). [11] Intellectual luminaries such as Theodor W. Adorno, [12] Walter Bagehot,

[13] Lawrence Durrell, [14] David Hume, [15] T.E. Lawrence, [16] Theodor Mommsen, [17] Montesquieu, [18] John Ruskin, [19] and Max Weber have also discussed national character. [20]

Social scientists have devoted great efforts to research, systematize, and theorize about this hoary topic, especially Americans in the World War II era. A bibliography of "principal writings of social scientists and historians on culture and personality, national character and American character" between 1940 and 1963, with annotations, fills seventeen pages and features many stars: Daniel Bell, Morroe Berger, Daniel J. Boorstin, Henry Steele Commager, Marcus Cunliffe, Merle Curti, Erich Fromm, Francis L.K. Hsu, Harold J. Laski, Max Lerner, Seymour Martin Lipset, Talcott Parsons, David Riesman, Walt W. Rostow, Arthur M. Schlesinger, Jr., Edward A. Shils, Melford Spiro, Thorstein Veblen, and William H. Whyte, Jr. [21]

Although the grand mid-century social scientific undertaking largely failed, it bears a close look to savor its colorful and idiosyncratic claims and to learn from its errors. In brief, the sociologists, anthropologists, psychiatrists, and others got carried away by disciplinary enthusiasms and made the fundamental mistake of ignoring change over time, in other words, the role of history.

Pre-World War II

Ascribing a national character, usually negative, to other peoples goes very far back; Hippocrates connected Europeans' martial qualities to their climate. [22] More broadly, the ancient Greeks developed the concept of *nomos*, meaning

conventions, rules and customs people take for granted. The Egyptian priest Manetho was an early antisemite. Medieval Muslims spoke of "a cowardly Turk, a covetous Arab, an uncivilized Persian, or a choleric Negro." [23]

Given their striking advancement over the rest of the world from about 1700, Europeans and their progeny accounted for their own success by invoking a mish-mash of self-satisfied explanations that included the superiority of the Caucasian race, European geography and climate, the Greco-Roman heritage, the Christian religion, and nationalism. In 1742, for example, the philosopher David Hume vented acerbically from on-high: "I am apt to suspect the Negroes to be naturally inferior to the Whites. . . . the most rude and barbarous of the Whites . . . have still something eminent about them." [24] With time, these casual notions evolved into ambitious theories about national character in hefty and learned tomes. For example, Richard Chenevix (1774-1830), a leading scientist, wrote a two-volume *Essay upon National Character* in which he devoted 1,121 pages to establish that England boasts the world's most "superior civilization" while France is "the nation that has retained the largest share of ferocity." [25]

As the disciplines of sociology, anthropology, and psychology developed, a great debate developed over the issue of external characteristics (climate, geography, type of government, etc.) versus heredity. The former, a minority opinion, won the support of the historian William Dalton Babington who averred that "there is no truth in the ancestral theory of national characters." [26] Or Sidney Gulick, an American professor of theology living in Japan, argued that "the more outstanding national characteristics are largely the result of special social conditions, rather than of inherent national character." [27]

But most scholars retained old ideas about "blood" and racial traits while imbuing these analyses with a new pseudo-rigor. In his influential *The Group Mind*, the acclaimed psychologist and William James chair of psychology at Harvard University, William McDougall, in 1920 contended that race "is of fundamental importance in determining national character" and found "no reasonable doubt that there are great differences between races, and that these may be, and in many cases have been, persistent through thousands of generations." In particular, he focused on brain size and offered such generalizations as ascribing to the negro race "certain specific mental peculiarities . . . especially the happy-go-lucky disposition, the unrestrained emotional violence and responsiveness." [28] In a 1893 study on *National Life and Character* that future U.S. President Theodore Roosevelt called "one of the most notable books of the century," [29] historian Charles Pearson relied on national character to predict race wars in which the "lower races will predominate" over the "higher races." [30]

Anthropologists went into the field to prove such theories. For example, after administering the Rorschach ink test to a number of "simple country folk" in western Morocco, Manfred Bleuler and his co-author jumped to the conclusion that the Moroccan lacks the European's "tendency to abstract generalization," that he is easily swayed by "a marked enthusiasm under the influence of momentary events," and that "he lacks the systematic, energetic, and persevering striving after outward success" that characterizes Europeans. [31]

In the special case of Japan, racial explanations served both to explain backwardness and achievements. Johannes Justus Rein, a German professor of geography, found the Japanese to be "a race of children, harmless, confiding, gay,

and inclined at all ages to childish games, easily interested in anything new even to the point of enthusiasm, but when only half acquainted with it speedily becoming weary of it." [32] Such Western ideas also convinced some Japanese: a prominent professor of philosophy, Tetsujiro Inoue, discerned from head shapes that Westerners possessed a more developed brain and wrote in 1889 that the "Japanese are greatly inferior to Westerners in intelligence, financial power, physique, and all else." [33]

But race and national character also accounted for positive Japanese qualities. A British captain and writer found the Japanese in 1859 "a very remarkable race" and declared it "impossible not to recognize in their colour, features, dress, and customs, the Semitic stock whence they must have sprung"; he concluded by predicting their future success. [34] Gulick in 1905 claimed that the Japanese proved "the inadequacy of the physiological theory of national character." His proof? "Were an Oriental necessarily and unchangeably Oriental, it would have been impossible for Japan to have come into such close and sympathetic touch with the West." He went on to predict that "Japan has a brilliant future before her, due . . . to her national character." [35] The sociologist Thorstein Veblen wrote in 1915 that the Japanese were doing so well due to "a parallelism [with Westerners] in racial composition." [36] Again, this appreciation had an impact on the Japanese; 1909, the polymath Inazō Nitobe wrote that "in the receptive faculty of the Japanese race there must be something which makes it near akin to the races of Europe. Is it due to the Aryan blood which may have come to us through the Hindoos, as . . . proved by craniological evidence?" [37]

German romantics and nationalists scrutinized their own and others' *Volksgeist* (national spirit) in a systematic way and hoped to make an exact science

Inspired by Nazi ideology, German social scientists went on to develop a vast pseudo-science based on racial characteristics; the eminent psychologist Erich R. Jaensch used his prestige, his power, and the results of his research into vision and memory to draw up bio-psychological types and a purported scientific basis for Jewish racial inferiority, [39] thereby winning Hitler's favor. The Nazi regime, anthropologist Margaret Mead notes, even made "a systematic attempt to alter [the German] national character." [40] German efforts imbued the idea of national character, in the words of Austrian sociologist Frederick Hertz, with "a new and sinister significance." [41]

World War II – Studies

Already in 1872, the great liberal philosopher John Stuart Mill held that "the laws of national (or collective) character are by far the most important class of sociological laws" and urged the development of a discipline he dubbed "Political ethology, or the science of national character." [42] But he did not pursue the idea, nor did anyone else until World War II. That war prompted three momentous changes among Anglophone social scientists: they agreed that "the problem of national character is of fundamental importance—now and in the future"; [43] they abandoned the racial approach in favor of a focus on personality and child-rearing; and they sought to apply insights on national character to public policy.

They aimed high in terms of influence. The British journal *Nature* explained in a 1941 editorial:

To the statesman who must handle the broad issues of future policy, the enduring features of national character and the trends of its development are equally significant. There can be few more important tasks for the social sciences than to contribute to the full understanding of the character, mood, and prevailing interests of the nations among which the War is being fought, and by which an international order must be reconstituted. [44]

In addition, Allied scholars sought to understand their own populations, to reach out to friends in enemy territory, improve relations with allies, and provide guidelines for occupying forces. [45] An author in *Science News* even hoped national character studies could avoid "those misunderstandings and misinterpretations which may lead to war." [46]

Heeding these offers of help, the U.S. government called on the services of noted academics to interpret the Axis, especially Japan. The Office of War Information and other agencies of the U.S. government invited leading anthropologists and psychologists to pitch in. Their questions, as reported by anthropologist Ruth Benedict, included these:

> Was capitulation [by the Japanese] possible without invasion? Should we bomb the Emperor's palace? What could we expect of Japanese prisoners of war? What should we say in our propaganda to Japanese troops and to the Japanese homeland which could save the lives of Americans and lessen Japanese determination to fight to the last man? . . . When peace came, were the Japanese a people who would require perpetual martial law to keep them in order? Would our army have to prepare to fight desperate bitter-enders in every mountain fastness of Japan? Would there have to be a

revolution in Japan after the order of the French Revolution or the Russian Revolution before international peace was possible? Who would lead it? Was the alternative the eradication of the Japanese? [47]

Of special note was the undertaking dubbed "fieldwork-at-a-distance" in countries that could not be entered. Anthropologists, whose usual research focused on small-scale societies, stressed features of social life—notably kin ties, family relations, and communal beliefs. Psychologists placed great emphasis on Freudian concepts of personality, childhood rearing practices, and sexuality. Although they fully recognized that Burmese, German, Japanese, Romanian, and Thai societies differ profoundly from the small South Pacific or African societies they had studied (making these anthropologists wary about making generalizations), certain professional orientations carried over.

Studies by Geoffrey Gorer, Weston La Barre, and Ruth Benedict stand out, all pertaining to Japan. Gorer's pathbreaking analysis of March 1942 [48] looked at three aspects of upbringing in Japan and drew far-reaching conclusions about the country's politics and military.

First, he held that "drastic toilet training" lay at the basis of the value system. This accounts for why the Japanese lack a sense of moral absolutes and care less about right and wrong than about doing the right thing at the right time. It also explains "the striking contrast between the all-pervasive gentleness of Japanese life in Japan . . . and the overwhelming brutality and sadism of the Japanese at war." It leads to a preoccupation with ritual, encouraging compulsion and even neurosis; this in turn explains the unbalanced nature of Japanese society. And because obsession leads to aggression, the Japanese need occasionally to vent their dangerous urges through foreign adventures.

Second, Gorer held that sons are subservient to their fathers but dominate their mothers. This memory causes Japanese rulers to see other states as masculine or feminine; the former they respect, the latter they despise. Gorer actually compared the Japanese sack of Manila to an "angry boy" who wants to "destroy his mother's hair-do and break her precious pins."

Third, he read great significance into the Japanese habit of mocking children to get them to behave. This leads Japanese to feeling endangered "unless the whole environment is understood and as far as possible controlled." From this, it is only a short leap to world dominion. "The Japanese can never feel safe unless, as some of their more bombastic military speakers have proposed, the Mikado rules the whole earth."

Gorer's astonishing jumps from child to adult and from home to the political sphere inspired a large literature.

La Barre found that the "severity or cruelty" employed in toilet training of children causes the Japanese to be "probably the most compulsive people in the world ethnological museum." Indeed, the whole Japanese personality "is shaped by the struggle against and reactions" to the demanding training that accompanies a "culturally colored conditioning of the sphincters." Specifically, an emphasis on preserving "face" leads the Japanese to engage in aggression in a surreptitious manner; and this may account for Japanese behavior at Pearl Harbor. Relations between the sexes also have a direct bearing on international politics, for the "constant, easy brutalitarian dominance of the male over the female in Japan, as in Germany, has a direct influence upon their attitudes

toward weaker, hence 'inferior' peoples." La Barre even argued that "Americans owe it to the Japanese to modify the Japanese social system with great drasticness, sureness of purpose, and thoroughness." [49]

Benedict toned down Gorer's and La Barre's emphasis on child-rearing practices and Freud's anal-erotic theory Kerlinger 251 in the most impressive and lasting fieldwork-at-a-distance study, her *The Chrysanthemum and the Sword*. She uncovered a Japanese character formed by stringent toilet training and a shame culture which created a nation of obsessively clean, polite, and obsequious individuals. Still, she too saw a ready connection between family and state; an attitude of respect for the father, for example, "becomes a pattern throughout Japanese society." [50]

World War II—Policy Recommendations

These analyses struck a responsive chord and so were widely (and crudely) disseminated. A report prepared in 1944 for General Douglas MacArthur held that the small physical size of the Japanese accounted for their aggression: "In every sense of the word the Japanese are *little people*. Some observers claim there would have been no Pearl Harbor had the Japanese been three inches taller." [51] MacArthur himself described the Japanese national mentality as that of a "twelve-years old" [52] and proclaimed his goal in Japan to be the "reshaping of national and individual character." [53]

With one main exception, policy recommendations emerging from this analysis turned out poorly. In particular, national character specialists predicted that the Japanese and Germans must undergo profound shifts before they could absorb

democratic ways after World War II. Anthropologist Douglas G. Haring wrote of Japan in 1946 that democracy "cannot be created by fiat among a people whose deepest feelings run counter to democratic tradition. Only by changing the patterns of social experience in infancy can a society undergo permanent reform, either toward democracy or toward autocracy." [54] Unfortunately for Haring, as he wrote those lines MacArthur was successfully imposing democracy on Japan by fiat—and without meddling in the country's child-rearing practices.

The British journal *Nature* drew pessimistic conclusions about Germany, editorializing in 1941 that because "there have not been many generations of [German] children who have grown up during periods when the ideals of democratic co-operation had currency among the adult population," postwar Germany is unlikely to change from its wartime horrors. [55] Morris Ginsberg concurred, writing in 1942 that the need for authority is deeply rooted in German life and that the relationship of inferior and superior pervades all spheres of activity. A prolonged period of education in other forms of organization will therefore be necessary before Germans are led to abandon the forms of order resting on authority and hierarchical subordination. [56]

Richard Brickner's 1943 diagnosis of German national character led him to prescribe draconian postwar measures on Germany, such as allowing couples to marry on condition they agreed to the government raising their children. [57] After the war's end and the start of the American Military Government, Bertram Schaffner, having taken part in the Nuremberg trials and worked on denazification, worried that even anti-Nazi Germans "are not aware of the very factors in German personal and family lives which make for authoritarianism, intolerance, distrust, aggression, and rigidity in their national behavior." He

advocated a lengthy occupation and called for not just ideological and institutional reform but by overhauling "interpersonal relations and family life." [58]

In fact, however, Germans did not need a "prolonged period of education" or government raising of children before they became democratic; elections to the Bundestag successfully took place just four years after the collapse of the Nazi regime.

The social scientists did make one policy recommendation based on national character that turned out well. As John Dower explains, they called on the Allies to "refrain from attacking the emperor and the imperial institution, the consummate symbols" of Japanese culture. Even here, however, Dower finds that the academics' argument "had negligible impact on the formulation of Allied war policy," rather undercutting its importance. [59] In brief, hard-headed government employees made good decisions, quite uninfluenced by the faulty analyses of social scientists.

Post-World War II—Criticism

At first, even critics of the Gorer-La Barre-Benedict analysis tended to accept their general approach. Anthropologist John F. Embree quibbled about details [60] and while psychologist Fred N. Kerlinger criticized them unsparingly ("untenable", "serious errors and bias"), he found "there is much good in their work." [61] Soon after the war's end, however, the reductive World War II-era studies, or what Clyde Kluckhohn called the "Scott Tissue interpretation of history," [62] came to be discredited, repudiated, and sometimes mocked.

Embree noted in 1945 that Japanese used roughly the same toilet training techniques during two centuries of peace. [63] Hamilton Fyfe, an antisemite and Communist sympathizer, wrote a whole book in 1946 to prove "national character to be an illusion, and one that is doing great harm in the world." [64] Haring wrote in 1947 that, "'National character' has provided a happy hunting ground for sentimentalists, demagogues, and collectors of curiosa. Scientific investigation is overdue." [65] A Japanese journal published five articles in 1949 on "Problems Raised by *The Chrysanthemum and the Sword*."

The year 1951 saw a boom in critiques: Bertram Wolfe, a specialist on Russia, mocked the baby-rearing theses: "in less time than you can un-swaddle a baby or change its diapers, they can tell MacArthur how to administer Japan, Truman how to deal with Russia, and [administrator of Allied-occupied Germany John] McCloy how to handle all the problems of German thought and institutions." [66] Psychologist Maurice Farber dismissed the wartime efforts as "produced by an impressionistic, essentially haphazard methodology." [67] Anthropologist Ralph Linton found that "recent studies have neither more nor less claim to scientific accuracy than the writings of Tocqueville or Charles Dickens" [68] and Haring found they "approach the fantastic." [69] Berger warned that "anthropologists, sociologists, and psychologists . . . must learn to avoid easy analogies between individual and national behavior." [70]

Two years later, anthropologist David Mandelbaum said that national character studies "are still in the first fledgling and perhaps fumbling stages." [71] Historian David Potter observed in 1954 that "the concept [of national character] is under a serious cloud, if not entirely discredited." [72] The terrible shadow of Nazi efforts further discredited the idea of national character, prompting the journalist

Milton Mayer in an influential book to note in 1955 that "[t]here is such a thing as national character, even though the Nazis said there is." [73] Things then got worse in the 1960s, when the near-absence of women, blacks, and other minorities from the discussion of national character offended many. Thus did E. Adamson Hoebel observe in 1967 that national character had "lost its savor" for anthropologists, most of whom find it "a blighted and unpromising field." [74]

Others found the concept plain useless. Japan specialist Ezra F. Vogel felt it necessary in 1979 to repudiate the national character approach to explain Japan: "Japanese success has less to do with traditional character traits than with specific organizational structures, policy programmes, and conscious planning." [75] In 1980, anthropologist Peter T. Suzuki [76] eviscerated La Barre's methodological shoddiness and superficial conclusions in his 1945 study of Japanese national character conducted in a Utah internment camp. [77] That same year, historian Richard Minear generalized that "statements about national character [are] intrinsically dangerous." [78] In a book on national character, psychologist Dean Peabody wrote of this topic that "seldom in intellectual history have so many poor arguments been based on so little relevant evidence." [79] Social psychologist Hiroshi Minami in 1988 criticized Benedict for writing a book that was "too static and a-historical to capture the real dynamics of Japanese social psychology." [80]

In a 2001 book on American national character, Jungian analyst Michael Gellert acknowledged that the "notion of national character is one of the vaguest and most mysterious in the history of ideas." [81] In 2006, Robert R. McCrae and Antonio Terracciano reviewed personality profiles in fifty-one countries and concluded that "perceptions of national character are unfounded stereotypes."

[82] The 2013 *Psychology Dictionary* entry for "national character" defined this as "primarily consist[ing] of stereotypes that are seldom accurate." [83] In 2016, Charles Hill of the Hoover Institution disdained the study of national character, noting that it "was once recognized as elemental" but now, as a topic, it "hides somewhere between the distastefully insensitive and the arrogantly impermissible." [84]

Post-World War II—Studies

Despite this volley of criticism, "The study of the national character was a central feature of post-World War II intellectual history. It was a project involving all of the branches of social science—history, psychology, sociology, anthropology, economics, and political science." [85] In 1951, sociologist Morroe Berger still expressed hope for "the growth of a formidable science of national character." [86] Between 1945 and 1955, anthropologists published books on, among others, the national characters of Americans, [87] Brazilians, [88] Chinese, [89] Indian, [90] the English, [91] Germans, [92] and Russians. [93] These works filled various demands: to distinguish national character from national stereotypes, [94] to work out occupation policies in Germany and Japan, and to develop military policy and strategy. [95] Psychoanalysts continued to put whole countries on the couch. Thus, Henry V. Dicks in 1950 found the typical German to have "ambivalent, compulsive character structure with the emphasis on submissive/dominant conformity, a strong counter-cathexis of the virtues of duty, of 'control' by the self, especially buttressed by re-projected super-ego symbols." [96] As late as 1967, the American

Academy of Political and Social Science devoted an issue of *The Annals* to "National Character in the Perspective of the Social Sciences," edited by the distinguished sociologist Don Martindale.

In 1985, Peabody surveyed opinions about national character in six countries, both ingroup and outgroup, in the process finding impressive agreement across the board on the characteristics of each country. [97] The *New York Times* published an article in 1990, "Why I Fear the Germans," that pointed to greater parental aggression toward children, as well as more acts of aggression among children, in Germany than in Denmark or Italy. [98] In 1997, sociologist Alex Inkeles collected his papers, surveyed the field and, with an emphasis on Germany, Russia, and the United States, concluded that much work remains to be done. [99] Books on the American, [100] Chinese, [101] English, [102] and eastern European [103] national characters, as well as on comparative national character development, [104] and levels of anxiety, [105] appeared in the twenty-first century, though they tended to be more retrospective than descriptive.

The debate remains alive and interest strong. JSTOR, the digital library of almost 2,000 academic journals and some other materials, lists over 42,000 articles that include the term "national character." [106] The entry on national character at the *International Encyclopedia of the Social Sciences* has been viewed over 2.5 million times. [107] The Google Ngram that documents the percentage of books in which a word or phrase appears shows a low level for *national character* from 1800 to 1925, then a ten-fold spike peaking in 1955-65, followed by an only modest decline thereafter. [108]

The discussion of national character today retains many of the specifics of earlier inquiries: while fanciful theories have largely evaporated, towering intellects long ago bowed out, and the inquiry is narrowly academic, it still echoes the grand sweep of those traditions. Reviewing the work of the "National Character School," anthropologist Sujay Rao Mandavilli concludes that it left an "indelible mark" on social and cultural anthropology. [109]

Conclusion: The Need for History

What to make of the great mid-twentieth-century experiment to turn national character into a topic for objective analysis? Brilliant scholars came up with original and captivating ideas, clearly expressed. Unfortunately, the social scientists largely ignored a crucial dimension: the historical. This absence went far to undermine the utility of their work.

Simply put, unchanging national character cannot explain change over time. Even if one accepts theories about child-rearing in Japan and Russia, these cannot account for the aggression of their regimes at a moment in time. In Farber's words: "No key to history . . . can be furnished by a method that is, in its essence, anti-historical." [110]Over-confident social scientists ignored this rule and tried to explain historical developments without reference to history. In their most absurd form, knowing toilet-training practices obviated an understanding of Japanese history and the swaddling of infants meant ignoring Russia's evolution. Social structures were made to replace all other causative forces, including individual personality, bureaucratic infighting, political ideology, religious emotion, and economic interests.

"With a wave of the anthropologist's wand," writes Minear, "historical reality disappears, and psycho-cultural analysis remains." He continues, focusing on the effort to understand Japanese actions:

> the wartime researchers were anthropologists, not historians, yet they addressed themselves with confidence to questions from which most historians would have flinched. . . . the wartime researchers into Japanese national character were poor historians. They were insensitive to the historical setting in which they worked and from which they tried to abstract Japanese national character. What is more, most of them came to see their analyses of Japanese national character as an explanation of Japanese history, an answer to such questions as why Japan invaded China and why Japan attacked the United States. . . . they saw a direct link between Japanese national character and Japanese foreign policy, a link which relieved them of any need to examine the actual historical setting of the 1930s.

Minear continues, with specific reference to Benedict's *Chrysanthemum and the Sword*: "What if the causes of the war were imperial or economic rather than cultural? These are not possibilities Benedict considers seriously. Ultimately, her depiction of Japanese character, heavily historical in content, becomes a character explanation of history. . . . Benedict's analysis thus isolated Japanese behavior from its historical context." [111]

The notion of a "social scientist" implies the possibility of studying mankind as one would amoebas or asteroids. The brief but intense scholarly incursion into the murky world of national character suggests the severe limitations of scientific and "historyless" [112] methods when applied to humans. As ever, history

provides a necessary approach. In Jacques Barzun's formulation: "the form requisite to convey an explanation of a people is the historical. Don't describe! Tell us what happened, who was there, and who said what." [113]

Some social scientists did acknowledge their errors. Already in 1944, the psychologist Otto Klineberg ruefully acknowledged that the study of history "is an absolute prerequisite for a complete picture. Without it, we will make one mistake after another." [114] In 1953, the anthropologist Haring conceded that the Japanese national character must be seen in light of historical developments, thereby implicitly recanting his earlier writings (especially the 1946 article, "Aspects of Personal Character in Japan"). [115]

Were social scientists ever seriously to return to this topic—and they could, for as sociologist Don Martindale notes, "A rich heritage of notions and observations on national character is available" to them [116]—they should learn from the grand but failed study of national character and make history central to their future inquiries.

When they do, they will find themselves in good company. Historian David Potter reports that, "Among the more prominent American historical writers, there is hardly one who does not, either occasionally or constantly, explicitly or implicitly, invoke the idea of an American national character." For nationalist historians generally, Potter notes, "the concept of national character became . . . the one dominant historical assumption which pervaded the treatment of all their material," though he concedes they do little to elucidate the concept. [117] Indeed, Potter is the rare historian who incorporates national character research

in his work, a study of the American character; in a sophisticated historical review, he finds its key not in the usual categories of individualism or conformity, but in a singular commitment to equality. [118]

So, the basis does exist for a sound inquiry into national character.

Appendix: Definitions

A roster of distinguished authors has defined *national character*; here are some. Keywords are italicized:

- Gordon Allport: "members of a nation, despite ethnic, racial, religious, or individual differences among them, do *resemble one another in certain fundamental patterns of belief and conduct*, more than they resemble members of other nations." [119]
- Jahangir Amuzegar: "if a majority of people *routinely* display certain *attitudes and behavior patterns* not found as commonly or as frequently elsewhere, they may be said to possess a specific national character." [120]
- Ernest Barker: it is "the sum of *acquired tendencies* built up by its leaders in every sphere of its activity, with the consent and co-operation—active in some, but more or less passive in others—of the general community." [121]
- Morroe Berger: "the members of a nation, despite admitted differences among them, resemble one another in certain *basic patterns of behavior and belief* . . . more than they resemble the members of other nations." [122]
- Richard Chenevix: it is the sum of "*prominent and leading features* by which that nation is distinguished." [123]
- Henry V. Dicks: "the broad, *frequently recurring regularities of certain prominent*

behaviour traits and motivations of a given ethnic or cultural group." [124]

- Morris Ginsberg: "differences in *certain traits or perhaps types* in different groups." [125]

- Geoffrey Gorer: "National character is an attempt to isolate and identify . . . *shared motives and values and predispositions*." [126]

- Sania Hamady: "It stands for a *common denominator of characteristics*, with individuals varying from it in different directions and degrees." [127]

- Vidya Hattangadi: "*personality characteristics and patterns* that are archetypical among the adult members of a society." [128]

- Frederick Hertz: "the *totality of customs, habits and beliefs* widespread in a nation." [129]

- Alex Inkeles and Daniel J. Levinson: it is the "relatively enduring *personality characteristics and patterns* that are modal among the adult members of the society." [130]

- Alex Inkeles: "the *dispositions built in the personalities* of the individuals who make up a society" and national character is "the sum of such qualities across the individuals who make up a national population." [131]

- Hans Kohn: "Life in a common territory, subject to the same *influences of nature and . . . history and legal systems*, produces certain common attitudes and traits, often called national character." [132]

- Don Martindale: "National characteristics are a category of *traits that individuals come to display in national groups*." [133]

- John Stuart Mill: It is "the character, that is, the *opinions, feelings, and habits* of the people." [134]

- Raphael Patai: it is "the sum total of the *motives, traits, beliefs, and values* shared by the plurality in a national population." [135]

- Richard Pipes: it "represents the *spirit* not of an entire nation, but only of that social group which at a given time happens to control the instruments of power and the organs of opinion." [136]

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[1] Jacques Barzun, "The English," *The Nation*, August 14, 1943, 188.

[2] Don Martindale, "The Sociology of National Character," *The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* 370 (1967): 31.

[3] Thomas Sowell, "The Character of Nations," *National Review* (June 2009).

[4] Theodore Roosevelt, "National Life and Character," *The Sewanee Review* (May 1894).

[5] Stanley Baldwin, "What England Means to Me," speech to the Royal Society of St George, May 6, 1924; "Mr. Major's Speech to Conservative Group for Europe," johnmajorarchive.org, April 22, 1993; David Cameron, "Speech to the Foreign Policy Centre Thinktank," *The Guardian*, August 24, 2005.

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