

63202

This Crisis Is an Opportunity

by LOUIS ADAMIC

Reprinted from COMMON GROUND

Autumn 1940

Common Council for American Unity
Incorporated

222 Fourth Avenue, New York, N. Y.

COMMON COUNCIL FOR AMERICAN UNITY

Board of Directors

Nicholas Kelley, *Chairman*
John Palmer Gavit, *Vice-Chairman*
Will Irwin, *Vice-Chairman*
Eliot D. Pratt, *Treasurer*

Louis Adamic	Mrs. James A. Kennedy
Sigurd J. Arnesen	Robert D. Kohn
Mrs. George Backer	Frank J. Lausche
Edward Fisher Brown	Read Lewis
Allen T. Burns	Mrs. Jacob A. Riis
Fred M. Butzel	Josephine Roche
Mrs. Thomas Capek	Mrs. De Witt Stetten
Elizabeth Eastman	Robert K. Straus
Sylvan Gotshal	Ida M. Tarbell
James L. Houghteling	Graham R. Taylor
M. F. Wegrzynek	

Read Lewis, *Executive Director*
Marian Schibsby, *Associate Director*
Louis Adamic, *Editor, Common Ground*
M. Margaret Anderson, *Managing Editor*
Alan Cranston

The Common Council for American Unity which publishes this pamphlet is working to overcome intolerance and discrimination because of foreign birth or descent, race or nationality, to promote a common citizenship, and to bring about the acceptance, in fact as well as in law, of all citizens, whatever their national or racial origin, as equal partners in American society. Its purposes and program are more fully set forth in Mr. Adamic's article. (See pages 14-16.)

Membership in the Council is open to all in sympathy with its purposes. The different kinds of membership include: General, \$1; Subscribing, \$3; Contributing, \$5 to \$100; Supporting, \$100 or over. All memberships of \$3 or more include a subscription to *Common Ground*.

"I know of no enterprise in which one may more effectively invest for the cultivation and maintenance of all that we mean by 'America.'"—JOHN PALMER GAVIT, in *The Survey Graphic*, September, 1940.

A pamphlet giving full information about the organization will be sent free on request.



This Crisis Is an Opportunity

THE world is not only at war; as President Roosevelt, Thomas Mann, Peter Drucker, Dorothy Thompson, Otto Tolischus, and others have emphasized, we are witnessing a tremendous and, so far, not unsuccessful attempt at world revolution of a peculiar kind. Hermann Rauschning calls it "the revolution of nihilism"; Archibald MacLeish, "the revolution against."

This is one of history's crucial periods. The issue may soon be decided, at least tentatively, seemingly decided; or the struggle may go on for years, even decades. Whatever happens in Europe, Asia, and Africa in the near future, and whether or not we are pulled into the vortex of actual hostilities, the immediate and long-range effect of these events upon the U.S. will be drastic and profound—this simply because we are intricately enmeshed with the rest of humanity and, more important, because we are not free internally of many of the subtle ills, weaknesses, and disorders that afflict other lands recently crushed or still under attack as I write.

The period since Munich has clearly revealed conditions in Europe that Europeans should have been "against" long ago. The trouble with the Nazi uprising is that its method and chief aim are destruction not only of the things which ought to be destroyed but of the good things as well. It is a revolution against *everything*.

To keep this upheaval now shattering Europe from overwhelming also the U.S., to say nothing of the rest of the Western Hemisphere, we Americans must promptly throw our best energies not only into military preparedness, but — especially — against the things we should have been passionately and effectively against long ago.

The President and others have lately talked of "total defense." I want to say that total defense will not be total nor defense of any sort in the long run, no matter how many millions of men we draft or how many billions of dollars we spend on arming them, unless the defense program is all-embracing from the very begin-

ning, and is based upon a firm realization that the U.S. is not primarily a big, rich hunk of geography, but an idea, a body of idealism, a way of life, a promise as yet largely unfulfilled. All of us, all the people of the country, will have to be drawn, not forced in any way, but drawn, inspired into full participation in the effort ahead, which will include armament, of course, but also — in fact, especially — a wide-flung and deep-reaching offensive for democracy within our own borders and our own individual makeups.

We must defend ourselves not with a mere "against" program, but by starting and carrying out action for positive developments which will preserve and enhance what is right and good in our national life, and which, to a large extent, will automatically displace the negative facts and forces. *Mere* "anti-fascism," *mere* "anti-totalitarianism" is insufficient; it may itself result in fascism and totalitarianism.

Psychological Civil War

In this effort before us, time is of the essence. If we fail to do what the moment calls for, then Goebbels, the well-informed Nazi propaganda chief, will be proven right when he said to Rauschning a few years ago: "The America of today will never again be a danger to us. Nothing will be easier than to produce a bloody revolution in the U.S. No other country has so many social and racial tensions. We shall be able to play on many strings there." If we do not or cannot achieve an all-embracing defense, a replacement of our weaknesses with strength and our tensions with unity, then Goebbels and Hitler will have little difficulty in "softening" the U.S. into impotence as they "softened" France and other countries during the years and months before the fateful events of last spring.

One of our greatest weaknesses and, at the same time, one of our great sources of strength lie in the unfortunately-named "Melting Pot" situation, in which I have been specially interested these past two years. Both are involved in the entire confused and as yet unwritten story of the waves of immigration that have washed against and spilled themselves over this continent. And it is this that I want to emphasize here.

Briefly, our weakness lies in a kind of psychological civil war, which is being waged among groups of various backgrounds within our population; our strength, in the emotions, motives, and impulses that brought us here, or most of us, in the past three centuries.

Our problem is to stop the psychological civil war

and begin to draw on the inner power of the story of this country; and the current moment of crisis presents, I believe, both the necessity and the opportunity to do this.

Necessity requires the cessation of anti-alienism now frequently aimed not only at aliens but also at naturalized immigrants and even at their American-born children, whose names sound "foreign" or who "look Jewish" or "Italian"; and of racism which forces into their respective corners of disadvantage the Indians and the Negro and Oriental Americans. Anti-alienism and racism tend to make tens of millions of our people ashamed of their backgrounds and origins, and put them "on the spot," on the defensive, into complex psychological predicaments wherein they cannot function positively as Americans and human beings. I know personally hundreds of people in the (also unfortunately-called) "minority" groups who, owing to these attitudes toward them, coupled with the generally unsound economic conditions, are contributing to the total effort of the country only a fraction of what they could with their talents and skills.

Anti-alienism and racism are one thing in comparatively normal times, when they lead mostly to nasty name-calling, exaggerations of the number of "aliens" and their alleged evil qualities, and suggestions they go back where they came from. Anti-alienism and racism are another thing in a period of crisis, when fear rises and impels multitudes of people to seek easy targets for blame and swift punishment in order to re-instate their own sense of symmetry and security in a world gone awry. Anti-alienism and racism now are apt to divert our attention from phases of the Fifth Column which are more formidable than the "alien" section of it.

Anti-alienism and racism now are liable to cause the country to overlook such very important facts as these — that many Negroes, immigrants, and their U.S.-born sons and daughters are or want to be whole-heartedly American in the best sense of the term; that the loyalty to the U.S. of most of the foreign-born is almost beyond adequate statement; that the majority of them, like many of their American-born children, are more passionately anti-totalitarian than are a great many old-stock Americans, and this not only because they are good Americans but also and particularly because they or their parents were born in certain countries in Europe: in Norway, Sweden, Holland, Finland, Denmark, Belgium, France, Britain, Bohemia, Slovakia, Poland, Hungary, Rumania, Greece, or Yugoslavia,

and in Germany or Italy; or because they are Jews or Catholics.

It will be important that as an extension of the racist nonsense and the rising anti-alienism of recent years, and in connection with the necessary anti-Fifth Column measures, the country does not — as it did in the similar situation during 1914-'21 — work itself into some approximation of the violent, one-sided "Americanization" drives, which did not truly Americanize the foreign-born who got caught in them but did *de-Americanize* some Americans; which aimed to turn quickly, as by magic, all the Albanians, Slovaks, and Lithuanians into imitation Anglo-Saxon Americans, and thereby succeeded mostly in turning them into more conscious, because intensely uneasy, Albanians, Slovaks, and Lithuanians; and which finally achieved full expression in the Palmer raids and the post-war K.K.K. A return to anything resembling this type of "Americanization," under whatever disguise, including "democracy" and "loyalty," must be avoided, generally and from the point of view of Defense. Now it would drive many aliens as well as new-immigrant citizens into the Fifth Column, especially if the Axis' successes continue.

There is need, however, of a real Americanization (without quotation marks), which will reach not only the aliens, the recent immigrants, but everybody, all of us, immigrants and old-stock Americans, old and young, white and colored, and people of all religious faiths and none. This Americanization should be a great educational movement built, roughly, out of the cognizance of a number of facts, conducted on several fronts, aimed at the young and the old, and motivated by a number of concepts and ideas which may be stated variously, but which I see thus:

The fact that its population is an extension of most of the Old World, stemming from about sixty different backgrounds, *constitutes perhaps one of the greatest advantages which the U.S. enjoys*. Our cultural and spiritual materials and powers are enormous, potentially well-nigh beyond calculation, and we have an opportunity to create — not easily, but with an effort of which we are capable; not quickly but in measurable time — a great culture on this continent; a culture which could approach being universal or pan-human and more satisfying to the inner human make-up than any culture that has as yet appeared on this earth.

With the aid of people stemming from Holland, Ireland, Germany, and France, the Anglo-Saxon group started the country, which for a time was preponder-

antly Anglo-Saxon and Protestant. It is no longer, and there is need of recognizing that the U.S. as it now stands is the expression and creation — in a greater or lesser degree — of all the people here.

The prevalent failure to recognize this fact constitutes one of this country's greatest weaknesses. It is the dark, quicksandy basis of the psychological civil war I mentioned — the prejudices, intolerance, and discriminations that shoot and fly in all directions, hitting nearly everybody in the country, back and forth, in this or that way, at one time or another.

Tolerance Not Enough

Some of those concerned for the future of the U.S. and democracy in connection with or apart from the current crisis, or narrowly worried about their own groups, have been preaching tolerance as a means of overcoming prejudice. But tolerance, it seems to me, is no long-range solution of intolerance; in fact, I incline to consider it the exact opposite. I know the dictionary definition of "tolerance," but in practice tolerance is only inactive intolerance; at best a negative virtue. One is tolerant when one endures passively something one does not like. It is mostly a veneer for intolerance, which cracks easily. It is the mere armistice in the psychological civil war. Tolerance is largely intolerance grown subtle, polite, distant, and beyond reach, where no one can deal with it. Moment-to-moment, tolerance may appear preferable to intolerance; in the long run, however, the condition that passes under the name of tolerance is more dangerous than intolerance. By its active desire to ignore problems which might prove personally distressing, rightly or wrongly, the sins of omission or unwillingness to act positively which are committed in its name are manifold; it covers up diseases which need attention. It causes persons and groups to assume defensive attitudes, which preclude vital communication with others . . . and there they are, separated by invisible chasms.

Democracy, if it is to be a positive way of life, requires something more than tolerance. The diverse elements of the U.S. population will have to try to *accept* one another. We need to look at each other, closely, objectively, critically, but without fear and with active, purposeful, and continuous effort toward understanding.

The central educational or cultural effort, both with youth and adults, should be not toward uniformity and conformity to the prevalent, as it was in the "Ameri-

canization" drives of twenty years ago, and as it still is to an entirely too great extent, but toward accepting and welcoming and *exploiting* diversity, variety, and differences which do not, and cannot conceivably ever, come into conflict with our national ideals and safety. The Fifth Column has to be eliminated, but, in doing that, we must not imitate, however mildly, Hitler's own and his fellow dictators' frenzy for uniformity and regimentation, and for stamping out diversity; and we must not succumb to their idea of the superiority of one group of humanity over the others. If we force uniformity and conformity, and create superiority on the one hand and inferiority on the other, we shall likely swamp the U.S. with general fear-ridden mediocrity and democratic disability, and thereby play directly into the hands of Hitler and Goebbels, who expect us to do just that.

What Is Americanism?

The Anglo-Saxon Americans worked out the practical basis of the political and cultural set-up of the U.S., with the ideological aid of Plato and Shakespeare; and also of the thirteenth-century Scholastic philosophers, who were Spaniards, Italians, and Frenchmen; of Rousseau, another Frenchman; of the Old Testament, a Jewish book, and of Jesus Christ, a Jew; and (as Prof. Arthur M. Schlesinger, of Harvard, points out in his article, "Immigrants in America," in the first issue of COMMON GROUND) with the tangible help and on the insistence of the Irish and German elements that were here early in the career of the country and had within them powerful urges toward liberty. . . . Then, what is Americanism? To me, it is not the patent or monopoly of any group, but, rather, a concentrate of the aspirations and tendencies of humanity at its best nearly everywhere at one time or another. It is a movement away from primitive racism, fear, and defensive nationalism and herd instincts and mentality; a movement toward freedom, creativeness, a universal or pan-human culture. The American Dream is not restricted to old-stock Americans. The recent immigrants from all over Europe had it within them before they ever saw or experienced America. It caused tears to well from their eyes as they glimpsed the Statue of Liberty. (I have an idea that Europe is crashing into ruin partly because too many "Americans," people addicted to liberty, left there and came here during the last hundred years.)

We need to work toward a synthesis of the old-stock

and the new-immigrant America, of the Mayflower and the steerage, of Plymouth Rock and Jamestown and Ellis Island, of the Liberty Bell and the Statue of Liberty, of the New England wilderness and the slums of modern industrial cities, of the American Revolution and the Industrial Revolution.

As a country and as individuals, we need to get into a mood in which we will accept, not merely tolerate, one another. When I say "accept," I don't mean that one should like everybody. I mean that one's decisions to like or dislike or be indifferent to a man should be made on the basis of his essential qualities as a person, not because he was born an Armenian or a Yankee, or that he came over in the steerage or can sport a Mayflower blossom on his family tree.

We need to be trained, or train ourselves and train others, in the direction of becoming creatively, positively, interested in a man partly *because* he is different; *because* being different, he is apt to have something out-of-the-ordinary to offer us personally and contribute to our evolving culture and civilization. Emerson said, "It is the 'not-me' in my friend that charms me."

If we invite diversity, and are interested in it and use it, we will produce unity — automatically — and make it dynamic, bring out the basic sameness of people, and break down both the superiorities and inferiorities which oppress large sections of the population, and which are equally bad — two ends of the same stick, the source of one of Goebbels' greatest "tensions" in the U.S., a tool with which he means to "soften" this continent.

If we insist on uniformity, we probably will get outward or seeming concessions from a great many people, but we will not evoke an inner disposition to co-operation which will bind us into effective national unity. People can be terrorized into uniformity; they can only be inspired into unity.

We have two choices: we can go ahead in a spirit of bigness or in a spirit of bigotry. I am for doing what can be done to insure that our choice will be the former.

As a country, we need to arm, no doubt about that; and the actual Fifth Column must be dealt with, if possible, exclusively by the F.B.I. and the military intelligence services, without the interference of busy-bodies who want to help them. But equally needful is quick and widespread revision of our national mentality, so it will include the realization that America is not something finished in the post-Revolutionary dec-

ades, but a process which has barely begun; that, as John Dewey says somewhere, of the three paramount elements of democracy — liberty, equality, and fraternity — fraternity is the most important; that we must curb our individual and group egoism and begin to feel that, whatever our background or "race" or religion, we are not nearly as perfect as we like to think; that our value as individuals and as groups within the population is not as something finished and perfect and final, but mostly as material for the future; and that, instead of humiliating and lacerating one another, we should try to work up a little humility in ourselves.

There is need, too, of stating Americanism over and over again, in various forms, *as an expanding concept*, so that it will include all of us, whether our name is Simpson, Tashjian, Paulos, Starzinski, Brown, Schmidt, Jorgensen, Hamilton, Smith, or Epstein, or whether we like the New England boiled dinner, spaghetti, liverwurst, or goulash; and so that within it we will be able to achieve a firm *subjective* identification with the country and the democratic process.

My impression, gained from my recent travels and study, is that for a variety of reasons millions of people of recent-immigrant strains, to say nothing of the Negroes, lack this subjective identification, albeit most of them are trying hard, although not too intelligently, to achieve it. In the face of prejudice, "tolerance," anti-Semitism, and anti-alienism — coupled with poor or uncertain economic conditions — many tend to hang back from the main streams of our national affairs and problems, to "get by," to want to be let alone, to accept whatever befalls them. I find that many, when they say "we," do not mean "we Americans" or "we the people in this town," but "we who live in this section and are of Polish or Syrian background." When they say "Americans," they do not usually mean themselves. To old-stock Americans they wontedly refer as "they" or "the English," who have all the advantages. They are "marginal" people, not only economically but generally — culturally. They are geared not to the expansive, creative impulses of America, but to the fear- and confusion-prompted trends to contract and narrow down.

Many are not part of the strongly and firmly anti-totalitarian majority I mentioned earlier. They are not anything firmly or strongly. They are insecure, negative persons, neither here nor there, but apt to swing anywhere, including into the Fifth Column, under leaders who may know, as Hitler and Goebbels know, what they need to touch them off. (One of them said

to me recently, "You got to hand it to Hitler!") They are dangerous, along with the similarly insecure or off-balance people among the old-stock Americans, whose number also runs into millions; many of whom have written to me or told me in person that they feel "like aliens" in their own country because their cities or towns are full of "these foreigners, these Italians and Jews," because America is no longer their kind of America, Anglo-Saxon America, and who need to be re-Americanized, repatriated. Now many are in a repressive, near-Hitlerian mood.

Enhancing Our Democracy

All of these people must be considered and helped to become identified with America as a country and an idea. They can be aided only by education and through the inclusive enhancement of our democracy.

It seems to me that unless we proceed to enhance our democracy with a skillfully and energetically conducted program of widespread education built upon and around the facts and ideas sketched here, our armament program will do us little good, especially if the totalitarians score a clear victory in the Old World. They and their Fifth Column — which is being recruited from *all* the elements of our population — will win internally, subtly, and surely, even if we manage to establish temporary military superiority over their power in Europe. They will defeat us without firing a shot at our shores and conquering us physically. They will exploit our inner confusion: the inferiorities and insecurities in individuals and groups constituting our population. After that, our mere sovereignty will hardly be worth fighting for.

The future, ours and the world's, is in unity within diversity, in making civilization safe for differences. The future is in liberty, equality, and fraternity; especially in the latter, to emphasize what John Dewey says somewhere. Writers in the Baltimore Evening Sun and The Nation have recently advanced as the explanation of the downfall of France the fact that *fraternité* was never realized in the life of Frenchmen. Their economic and social set-up operated against that ideal. It inevitably led to all-around defensiveness, of which the Maginot Line was the logical development, climax, and symbol. The social-class lines are not quite as sharp in the U.S. as they were in France, but our economic order as it is working out for a vast number of Americans is quite as antagonistic to brotherhood among men as was the French, and is productive of no

end of defensiveness. In addition, as already emphasized, we have here acute divisions based on Old World backgrounds, skin pigmentation, and religion—divisions of which France was largely free.

Suddenly the U.S. is conscious of a vague but great danger. There is the anti-Fifth Column hysteria. It brought on the Alien Registration Act. This Act and its current execution give the less discerning citizenry the illusion that the Government "is doing something" to protect the country; that illusion momentarily helps to keep them from undesirable activity, which gives alien registration a certain justification. But fear and worry continue, especially among the intelligent, who know that the aliens are not the great danger, nor the Bunds and other openly pro-Nazi and pro-Fascist groups, for these are known and can be dealt with. What bothers many Americans are intangible and unknown factors, the ambiguities, the *ifs* and *maybes* in the situation; the thoughts and feelings, the attitudes and responses of the people down the street with whom they have no contact, the people in the immigrant slums and, if they are new-immigrants, the folks in the favored and restricted old-stock American districts of our cities. Many Americans wonder and worry what "they" may be saying among themselves. They recall our past experiences with one another. They realize that, for the most part, we do only tolerate one another. They suspect that if so-and-so happens, some of the people in their immediate proximity probably will not stand up in the face of the situation. The atmosphere in which they live and move is suddenly a maze of question-marks. *What? Who? Where? How soon?* They know or feel that the responses and attitudes of many people are delicately balanced, and apt to swing or swerve this way or that, depending on events in Europe, or how the Depression develops—and often they judge others by themselves.

These are the real ingredients of the American fears and worries these days, which create hysterical impulses to run in all directions at once, and to chase with a pickaxe everything that may seem unfamiliar or different, or to dive for cover. Some of us are diving for cover as I write this, even before pickaxes have begun to swing. On the street in New York I meet an acquaintance who is a well-known man, an immigrant; he asks me what I am about; I tell him that I am busy with this magazine; and he warns me I should give it up—"there is going to be hell to pay in this country, and the thing for us immigrants to do is to lay low." Scared, on the defensive, he is typical of many immi-

grants and also of vast numbers of their American-born children. They have never had a firm sense of what psychiatrists call "belongingness," necessary for a full, balanced development of character and personality and for effectiveness in a creative way within a culture; and in a time like this many bend to the wind. Behind this lack of "belongingness," this current tendency to duck and hide, is the whole story of the mistakes made in connection with and by the New Immigration.

It Is Not Too Late

This may seem a bleak picture. I present it here incompletely; in some ways, here and there, it is worse than I suggest. But it need not be a cause for despair, for succumbing to a feeling of futility and the idea that "it is too late." Rather, it may be a chance to *do* something, to accomplish what we have long needed.

To my view, this period is a testing time for us as a country, as individual Americans; an experience which we must go through to learn what we are as human beings, what we are as elements within the population, as a people, as a nation, in order to clarify ourselves, to find out what we feel and think and why, and where we belong as a country in the current maelstrom of world forces and ideas. This period is a rare opportunity.

In so-called normal times, there is an indifference, a lassitude about problems, especially about the more serious ones, which are subtle, hidden, difficult to define, hard to catch into headlines and bring into light; such problems as those woven through the entire situation which has developed in this country during the past century around the fact that tens of millions of immigrants, most of them non-Anglo-Saxons and non-Protestants, have come into this country, which 100 years ago tended in the direction of an Anglo-Saxon-Protestant homogeneity. Now is the time to X-ray these problems, this whole situation; and act. Now, in crisis and tension, the situation will be clearer than ever before. Our weaknesses will stand out. They will become material for headlines. The country's awareness and emotional quality will be heightened. As a people, we will be eager for integration; there will be a desire for synthesis; but, with the Fifth Column and the inevitable and necessary drive against it, we will have difficulties in achieving it. These difficulties will not be anything new, but the need of alleviating them will be clearer than ever before and will call for our

greatest effort. We can and must help the moment to bind us together. It is not too late, but there is no time to lose.

In the October, 1934, *Harpers Magazine* I published an article entitled "Thirty Million New Americans," since expanded into a chapter in a book called *My America* (1938), in which I attempted a tentative and partial analysis of the inner predicament of the new-immigrant groups. That predicament is a matter mostly of prejudice- and "tolerance"-induced inferiorities, of general defensiveness, of hidden but intense cultural conflicts within immigrant families and in our so-called "foreign" sections, and of our entire national confusion, with its depressions and other economic and social ills.

The Common Council

At the end of that piece I suggested the formation of an organization which might deal or help to deal with the whole complexity of these problems; and during the past two years a group of people have engaged in the actual work of forming such an organization, evolving its purposes and program, and trying to find the necessary money for it. It was created on November 22, 1939, under the laws of the State of New York as the Common Council for American Unity, and announced on June 12, 1940. Its purposes are:

1. To help create among the American people the unity and mutual understanding resulting from a common citizenship, a common belief in democracy and the ideals of liberty, the placing of the common good before the interests of any group, and the acceptance, in fact as well as in law, of all citizens, whatever their national or racial origins, as equal partners in American society.

2. To further an appreciation of what each group has contributed to America, to uphold the freedom to be different, and to encourage the growth of an American culture which will be truly representative of all the elements that make up the American people.

3. To overcome intolerance and discrimination because of foreign birth, descent, race or nationality.

4. To help the foreign-born and their children solve their special problems of adjustment, know and value their particular cultural heritage, and share fully and constructively in American life.

I have no authority to speak for the organization;

as I understand its still-forming plans, however, the Common Council hopes to achieve its purposes by putting into operation, step by step as financial and other energies become available, a program which it announced in June:

1. Assembling as complete information as possible about our different racial and nationality groups, their backgrounds, contributions, problems, and activities, and about inter-racial and inter-cultural problems in general, including among other things:
 - a. Stimulation of theses and research in this field by students in social-science departments of our universities and others.
 - b. Co-operation with foreign-language groups and especially with foreign-language historical societies.
 - c. Establishment of archives for original manuscripts, letters, scrapbooks, newspapers, or other records of historical importance.
 - d. Field studies.
2. Dissemination of such information and material through such means as:
 - a. Magazine devoted to these subjects and problems.
 - b. Stimulation of articles in other publications.
 - c. Information service to English-language press.
 - d. Center of information for answering individual inquiries.
 - e. Publication of suitable pamphlets.
 - f. Exhibits of what each group has contributed to American life and culture.
 - g. Bookshop for distribution of books and materials on these subjects.
3. Speakers' Bureau.
4. Educational work on radio.
5. Work with schools:
 - a. Publication of pamphlets, bibliographies, and other material suitable for school use.
 - b. Working out programs and suggestions for schools and teachers.
6. Work in motion-picture field.
7. Close co-operation with appropriate government departments and officials.
8. Legislative work against unfair and discriminatory proposals and for constructive measures, through appearance at Congressional hearings, education of public opinion, public meetings, etc.
9. Study of inter-racial intolerance in English and foreign-language press, on platform and radio, and reply thereto by:

- a. Press releases.
- b. Getting people to answer — by way of “instant rejoinder”— attacks and misinformation in local editorials, letters to the editor, etc.
- c. Arranging for radio time to answer attacks on radio.
10. Development of local discussion groups consisting of persons of various backgrounds.
11. Educational releases to foreign-language press.
12. Educational work on foreign-language radio hours.
13. Work with immigrant organizations to promote education, suitable programs for second generation, community contacts, etc., through such means as personal conferences, attending conventions, news-letters, development of discussion programs for local branches, etc.
14. Co-operation with social, educational, patriotic, and other agencies, working, or interested in this field.
 - a. Technical information on naturalization, immigration, and other questions necessary in advising the foreign-born.
 - b. Program and personal information.
15. Annual national conference, for common counsel, co-operation, and exchange of ideas, of foreign-language editors and organization officials, and all others working in this field or interested in ethnic and inter-racial problems.
16. Personal-service bureau to advise and assist the foreign-born, particularly those not within reach of competent local agencies, in solving their individual immigration, naturalization, and adjustment problems.
17. Publication of naturalization pamphlet, handbook for newcomers, and other literature designed to facilitate citizenship and adjustment.
18. Encouragement of the folk arts and other potential contributions and the promotion of opportunities for instruction and participation.
19. Essay and other contests, especially for young people of foreign parentage, designed to stimulate interest in and appreciation of their particular cultural heritage.
20. A further revision of American history textbooks to give adequate recognition and space to the newer strains in our population.
21. An ethnic and racial encyclopedia or handbook of the American people.

However, too much must not be expected of the Common Council too soon. At the beginning, and per-

haps for some time, its energies are apt to be all too limited. And, even in its most ambitious moments, the organization does not pretend to be anything but a possible vehicle of approach to the problem. What is needed in this crucial but very stimulating and favorable moment is that, using the ideas and suggestions in this article for what they may be worth, individuals and schools and organizations begin to act in their localities — for the time being independently of the Common Council.

What You Can Do

Traveling about this past year, I have been suggesting on my own initiative the formation of numerous small local groups of ten to twenty people belonging to various backgrounds and religions. A number of them have been formed, and it seems to me that these groups — at whose meetings the cultural-racial situation in the U.S. is discussed, along with economic and political problems, critically but on a basis of acceptance — are among the most positive organizations in the country, clear manifestations of active democracy. Here and there they are springing up spontaneously and beginning to put an end to defensiveness, to the psychological civil war. In various forms, and with varying degrees of effectiveness, they existed for years in some of the fifty-odd International Institutes, which (not really international, but intra-American) are to be found in as many cities scattered from coast to coast, doing excellent work in this field. I hope these groups will find COMMON GROUND useful as either the basis or the jumping-off place for discussion.

But mere talk, reading, and getting acquainted will not be enough in the long run.

I suggest that small committees, consisting of a few, perhaps not more than a score, of the best people (best as to character, intelligence, and prestige) in the old-stock and new-immigrant elements in the communities or neighborhoods, be organized to survey, and then keep a steady and sane eye on the local cultural-racial situation and do everything possible to improve it: for the probability is that it needs improving. I believe the Common Council hopes eventually to employ and develop field directors who will be able to give advice on specific problems and situations, and help in organizational matters.

But, having come into existence, what, concretely, can the local committees do? They can attempt some of the things locally that the Common Council aspires

to do nationally. Where they exist, the International Institutes and some of the settlement houses already have considerable information (wherever possible the committees should include persons connected with these institutions), which could serve as a basis for a more thorough survey. The survey should go particularly into the matter of prejudice and discrimination and "tolerance" toward the new-immigrant and Negro groups, and into their resultant negative or defensive attitude and social organization. The next step should be to tackle the entire local atmosphere of prejudice and defensiveness. One cannot be very specific in recommending procedure in a variety of communities, but I think COMMON GROUND contains numerous general and near-specific ideas. Schools and colleges should be drawn into this task.

Local committees should put themselves in position to help individual victims of discrimination and tactfully publicize such cases. Let me cite what spontaneously formed groups have actually done in recent months:

In a small Pennsylvania city a rumor got about that a local German American storekeeper was pro-Hitler, anti-U.S., and whatnot. His store was boycotted. Then a citizen who knew the man slightly suggested that a committee be formed to look into his views and give him a democratic chance to express himself. To shorten the tale, although he still had good things to say about the Germany he had known before he emigrated to the U.S. thirty-one years ago, the man was found to be a good citizen. Now he again has his place in the community, and the affair had a salutary effect on the atmosphere of the city as a whole.

In a Mid-Western town the school board discriminated against the "foreign" children on the other side of the tracks, who were all American-born of immigrant parents, by not giving them a bus to take them to and from school, although they lived farther from the new school than most of the old-stock American youngsters who were afforded bus transportation. The school board's idea was that "those foreigners ought to be glad to have a school to walk to." The director of the settlement house behind the tracks thought differently, and said so to a number of people, old-stock and immigrant, who saw her point, formed a temporary committee, and got a bus for the "foreign" youngsters too. The committee then organized on a permanent basis and has since smoothed out numerous other such wrinkles and noticeably improved the relations between old-stock and new-immigrant Americans.

There are almost endless chores and tasks like this that committees of representative, intelligent, tactful, purposeful people could do in their localities, especially in a critical period like the present and the future immediately ahead. Such committees could be points of sanity in their communities. They can become significant in the defense effort, which, as I have said, must include an offensive against the negative defensiveness which now marks the relations among the various elements of the population. They can become important in connection with the Fifth Column by seeing that the drive against it will not relegate the aliens and immigrants generally and large sections of the second generation to the purgatory of suspicion simply because they are aliens or immigrants or sons and daughters of immigrants.

It will be important that in the great majority of cases, instead of going out on witch-hunts and vigilante expeditions, communities — through such committees as I suggest — examine and get to know what may seem dangerous because it is unfamiliar. If that is done, the odds are that, instead of uncovering a subversive villain in their next-door neighbor, the people will find an isolated, scared, suspicious, and lonely person eager to be a participating citizen. By allaying his and the community's fears and suspicions, just that much will be done toward pushing the balance in favor of democracy.

It will be important that, as employment increases in connection with the defense program, new-immigrant and colored persons are not discriminated against by labor managers on the grounds that they are "foreigners" or "niggers."

All action in this field will need to be open and bold, filled with the consciousness that it may well be very important work, both from the point of view of immediate national emergency and (in fact, especially) in the long run. "If we yield to bewilderment and hysteria," writes Professor Max Lerner of Williams College in *The Nation* for July 27, "we have three-quarters lost the battle. Now as never before we must know what we believe in, what America stands for, what the imperatives are which will determine our actions. The world in which we live is facing an era of wars, civil wars, and revolutions." Then he goes on to say what President Hutchins said in different words a month earlier: "Only a new tough-mindedness in the service of a set of fervent convictions can possibly rescue us from what seems the common doom. Only thus shall we master the dimensions of the battlefield which

has become our world, and act in it with the economy that makes survival possible, so that we may live in it with the grace that gives life meaning."

It will be our purpose to use this moment of crisis, this opportunity, and the moments which are to follow, to help crystallize—directly and indirectly—some of the imperatives and convictions essential to an America worth living in and dying for, and to suggest and urge action through which those imperatives and convictions may be translated into living reality.

—LOUIS ADAMIC.

COMMON GROUND — *A Postscript*

Common Ground, the new magazine in which "This Crisis Is an Opportunity" was first printed, is published by the Common Council for American Unity and edited by Louis Adamic.

It is intended as a meeting place where Americans, whatever their backgrounds, can become better acquainted with the almost infinite variety of their fellow-Americans, their aspirations and contributions. Through a diversity of literary forms it will explore our racial-cultural situation — the problems and promise that grow out of the fact that the United States was settled by peoples belonging to some three score national, racial and religious groups. The tables of contents of the first two numbers of Common Ground, which appear on the following pages, indicate the scope, variety and richness of its material.

Perhaps you are one of the old-stock Americans whose ancestors came to this country on the Mayflower. Perhaps you are a "new" American whose forebears were among the 38,000,000 immigrants of the last 100 years. "New" or "old," you are interested in the democratic tradition that brought us all here, in our common heritage and common future. "This Crisis Is an Opportunity" indicates the problems we now face in maintaining and extending that democratic idea. Can we stop the psychological civil war that Mr. Adamic speaks of, the discriminations, fears and group prejudices that threaten to confuse and weaken us? Can we draw on the inner power of the American epic, on the creativeness that our own diversity makes possible? Common Ground will keep you in touch with this situation, its dangers and potentialities. It will report what certain progressive communities, schools and civic groups are doing with regard to these problems.

It will suggest what you, as a citizen, a teacher, a clergyman, a social worker, a "new" or "old" American, can do to enhance our democracy.

At this moment when a world is dying and being born, Americans cannot afford to be strangers to each other. Common Ground will tell — with warmth and liveliness and humor — the story of the men and women who, whether "new" or "old," are—or should be — equal partners in American democracy. Our schools study the cultures of Greece and Rome, but how many teach our young people about the amazing array of peoples and cultures that meet in America? Common Ground contains much material for this needed study.

Common Ground has been enthusiastically welcomed by press and public. A few of the many reviews and comments are quoted on a succeeding page. They indicate that Common Ground fills a need met by no other magazine, that it should be in every public library, in the hands of teachers, ministers, priests, rabbis, editorial writers, social workers, and other key people. Any help you can give in extending its circle of friends and subscribers will be welcomed.

Common Ground begins as a quarterly of 100 pages, published in September, December, March and June. It is hoped to make it a monthly as soon as enough subscriptions make that possible. Subscription is \$2 a year, single copies 50 cents. The first issue of Common Ground has been reprinted, so that subscribers wishing a complete file, will still find copies available.

November 30, 1940.

COMMON GROUND

Common Council for American Unity

222 Fourth Avenue, New York, N. Y.

Enclosed please find \$_____ for

- ☐ \$2 A year's subscription to COMMON GROUND
- ☐ \$3 A subscribing membership in the Common Council, \$2 of which is for a year's subscription to COMMON GROUND.

☐ \$_____

Name _____

Street _____

City _____

(Please make checks payable to Common Council for American Unity)

COMMON GROUND — *Autumn 1940*

Table of Contents

HEAD AND HANDS WORKING TOGETHER, *by Mary Ellen Chase*

LOST AND FOUND, *by William Reilly*

TARAS SHEVCHENKO, *by Van Wyck Brooks*

LETTER TO MOTHER, *by John Ciardi*

IMMIGRANTS IN AMERICA, *by Arthur M. Schlesinger*

THE STORY IS YET TO BE TOLD, *by Michael De Capite*

WHEN AMERICA WAS THE LAND OF CANAAN, *by George M. Stephenson*

AMERICA BALLAD (Translation *by M. Margaret Anderson*)

ON BECOMING AMERICAN, *by Lola Kinel*

I ASK YOU, LADIES AND GENTLEMEN, *by Leon Surmelian*

WHO IS "NEGRO"? WHO IS "WHITE"? *by George S. Schuyler*

ON DEMOCRACY AND DEFENSE, *by Robert M. Hutchins*

THIS CRISIS IS AN OPPORTUNITY, *by Louis Adamic*

AMERICAN NEGRO EXPOSITION, *by Al Bernsohn*

THE REGISTRATION OF ALIENS, *by Alan Cranston*

MY JEWISH CLUB CARRIES ON, *by Marie Syrkin*

THE HIGH SCHOOL IN A NEW-IMMIGRANT COMMUNITY, *by William Suchy*

A FREE MAN'S INTELLECTUAL LIFE, *by Oswald Garrison Villard*

ON COMMON GROUND WITH CHILDREN'S BOOKS, *by Beatrice de Lima Meyers*

ORGANIZATIONS AND THEIR WORK —

Fireside Forums, Gary, Ind.

The American Civic Association, Binghamton, N. Y.

The American Common

The Cleveland Council for American Unity

Youth Interracial Fellowship Council

SCHOOLS AND TEACHERS

FROM THE IMMIGRANT PRESS

THE BOOKSHELF

COMMON GROUND — *Winter 1941*

Table of Contents

- THE ANATOMY OF PREJUDICE, *by Henry A. Davidson*
CITIZEN EINSTEIN, (Two Editorials)
LIFE WITH FATHER-IN-LAW, *by Mary Barnsley*
BOHEMIAN ECHOES, *by Mildred E. Bouscher*
MATHIAS GUBEC, *by P. B. Stoyan*
THESE, MY PEOPLE, *by Blanche Marhefka*
TWO NEW ENGLANDERS, *by Alice Carver Cramer*
RIVERSIDE DRIVE UNDER CONSTRUCTION (A Wood
Engraving), *by Hans Alexander Mueller*
JOZEFA KUDLICKA, *by Lola Kinel*
THE CHINESE STATES OF AMERICA, *by Howard
Mumford Jones*
THIS IS FREDDIE, *by Marguerita Rudolph*
A MAN MUST HAVE A COUNTRY, *by Henry C. Tracy*
LIL' YOKOHAMA, *by Toshio Mori*
LITTLE REFUGEE (A Wood Engraving), *by Fritz
Eichenberg*
ORIENTAL YANKEE, *by Younghill Kang*
BILL SAROYAN, *by John Fante*
THE NEW NATIONALITY CODE, *by Marian Schibsky*
BRIDGES OF UNDERSTANDING, *by Alice L. Sickels*
COLLEGES AND COURSES, *by M. Margaret Anderson*
THE EDUCATOR AND FIFTH-COLUMN DISCRETION, *by
Otto G. Hoiberg*
ORGANIZATIONS AND THEIR WORK —
 International Institutes
 Nationality Division: Detroit Council of Social Agencies
 Detroit Friends of Polish Art
 University in Exile
 New Jersey Goodwill Commission
 Japanese American Citizens League
 The Council for Democracy
 Americans All—Immigrants All
SCHOOLS AND TEACHERS
FROM THE IMMIGRANT PRESS
THE BOOKSHELF



The Critics Meet on Common Ground

"All of us had better devote some attention to learning the good things about all the people who make up America. They're here because they don't want the eternal, futile brawling of groups that they — or their ancestors — thought they were shaking when they left Europe. Common Ground's first issue does a grand, interesting job of helping us know our newest neighbors."—Herb Graffis, in *The Chicago Times*.

"A magazine like Common Ground may become as important a contribution to the psychology of national defense as any act passed by Congress."—Lewis Gannett, in *The New York Herald Tribune*.

"If there ever was need for a high-grade publication to spread the gospel of unity and understanding in this country, this is the time for its appearance."—*The Armenian Mirror-Spectator*.

"The publishers are to be congratulated upon the high quality of the first issue of Common Ground and upon their prophetic sense of the need of the hour for this kind of magazine."—*Pasadena Star-News*.

"I have finished your first number of Common Ground and am more enthusiastic than ever about it."—Earl G. Harrison, Director of Alien Registration, U. S. Department of Justice.

"Both the magazine and the movement should enlist the most devoted support of all teachers of the foreign-born."—*A California Teacher*.

"To those of us who still believe, in spite of the successes of brutality, that true democracy and tolerance in ever increasing doses is the best preservative of our liberty, your organization appears as a beacon."—Guido M. Crocetti, Jr., *A Student at Rutgers University*.

"Common Ground . . . has begun to attack in earnest the biggest American job of all. It is almost literally that, and certainly a thousand times more difficult than the building of a Boulder or Grand Coulee Dam. But at last it is being tackled, in sincere and deliberate fashion."—Ralph Thompson, in *The New York Times*.