

**AMERICA KEEPS MOVING: MOVEMENT, MOBILITY AND FAMILY**

**Textbook:** no text book reading this week.

**CRITICAL QUESTION:** how did "The existence of an area of free land" on america's western border for nearly 300 years influence the american family of today?

**Movement, mobility and family****1 two opinions and a song**

Extracts from:

Margret Mead, "We Are All Third Generation", Michael McGiffert, ed., *The Character of Americans (Homewood, Illinois: Dorsey 1964) 131ff.*

Americans establish ties by finding common points on the road that all are expected to have traveled, after their forebears came from Europe one or two or three generations ago, or from one place to another in America, resting for long enough to establish for each generation a "home town" in which they grew up and which they leave to move on to a new town which will become the home town of their children.

Many Europeans fail to find out that in nine cases out of ten the "home town" is not where one lives but where one did live; they mistake the sentimental tone in which an American invokes Evansville and Centerville and Unionville for a desire to live there again .

For life has ceased to be expressed in static, spatial terms as it was in Europe, where generation after generation tied their security to the same plot of ground, or if they moved to a city, acted as if the house there, with its window plants, was still a plot of ground anchored by fruit trees. On a plot of ground a man looks around him, looks at the filled spaces in the corner of the garden. There used to be plum trees there, but father cut them down when he was a child; now he has planted young peaches—the plot is filled up again. And he can lean over the wall and talk to the neighbor who has planted plums again—they are the same kind of people, with the same origins and the same future.

But for two Americans, there are no such common origins or common expectations. It is assumed, and not mentioned, that grandparents likely were of different nationality, different religion, different political faith, may have fought on opposite sides of the same battles—that great-great-grandparents may have burned each other at the stake....

If this then, this third-generation American, always moving on, always, in his hopes, moving up, leaving behind him all that was his past, represents one typical theme of the American character structure, how is this theme reflected in the form of the family, in the upbringing of the American child? What kind of parents are these "third-generation" Americans? These people who are always moving, always readjusting, always hoping to buy a better car and a better radio.

The American parent expects his child to leave him, leave him physically, go to another town, another state; leave him in terms of occupation, embrace a different calling, learn a different skill; leave him socially, travel if possible with a different crowd.

George W. Pierson, "The 'M' Factor in American History" Michael McGiffert, ed., *The Character of Americans (Homewood, Illinois: Dorsey 1964) 121,129.*

What made and kept us different was not just the wildness of the North American continent, nor its vast empty spaces, nor even its wealth of resources, powerful as must have been those influences. No. It was, first of all, the M Factor: the factor of movement, migration, mobility. Colonization was one part of it; immigration, another; the westward movement itself was a fraction, but only a fraction, of the whole. This whole began with many old-world uprootings. It gathered force with the transatlantic passage. It flooded on to the farmlands of the mid-continent. But increasingly it meant movement also away from the frontier, from farm to town, from region to region, from city to city. Individuals, families, churches, villages, on occasion whole countrysides have participated—and continue to participate. Francis Lieber said that in America he felt as if tied to the arms of a windmill. To him, movement had become our "historical task."

So we of a later generation must once again return to the great question: What has made and still makes Europeans into restless Americans? Movement means change. To transfer is in some part to transform. "Wanderung meint wandlung," as the Germans put it. Why should motion cause change? First, because institutions do not move easily. A few will be destroyed; many more are damaged; nearly all are shaken.

Why again should migration cause modification? Because the migrants are not average people. As a group they do not represent a fair cross-section of the society they are leaving; as individuals they tend toward exaggerations of one sort or another; as settlers they won't wish to reproduce the society they have left, or succeed in reproducing it even should they so desire. This brings us to the third great reason for change, the new circumstances: that is, the hardships and accidents of the crossing, the strangers encountered on the road, the unaccustomed climate and geography of their new environment. Movement means exposure, and successive exposures compel unexpected changes.

My third illumination, if we can call it that, concerns money. Foreigners still accuse us of being excessively money-minded, of measuring everything by the almighty dollar. As I was once thinking about the M-Factor, it suddenly came to me that on a journey, or in a new community, money was one of the few things that you could take along. Cash took the place of your pedigree or family letter of credit. It spoke with a certain authority, East or West. Money was power. But especially it was currency: the power that you could take with you. So on the moving frontier, in the new towns, it was differentiation by dollars that first disturbed the democracy of new mixtures.

*Now....a song for you. can you figure out from the hints in what era the song is set?*

### **STEVE EARLE HILLBILLY HIGHWAY**

My granddaddy was a miner but he finally saw the light.

He didn't have much, just a beat-up truck and a dream about a better life.

Grandmama cried when she waved good-bye, you never heard such a lonesome sound.

Pretty soon the dirt road turned into blacktop, Detroit city bound.

Down that hillbilly highway, on that hillbilly highway, that old hillbilly highway, goes on and on.

He worked and saved his money so that one day he might send  
My old man off to college to use his brains and not his hands.  
Grandmama cried when he said good-bye, you never heard such a lonesome sound.  
Daddy had himself a good job in Houston, one more rolling down  
That old hillbilly highway, that old hillbilly highway,

Granddaddy rolled over in his grave the day when I quit school.  
I just sat around the house playing my guitar, Daddy said I was a fool.  
My mama cried when I said good-bye, you never heard such a lonesome sound.  
Now I'm standing on this highway and if you're going my way, you know where I'm bound.  
Down that hillbilly highway

## **2 John Steinbeck's view plus the Czech situation**

Extracts from:

*John Steinbeck, Travels with Charlie ( New York: Viking Press, 1962) 95ff.*

[Writing about mobile homes....]

They are wonderfully built homes, paneled with veneer of hardwood. They have two to five rooms, and are complete with air-conditioners, toilets and baths. A mobile home is drawn to the trailer park and installed on a ramp, a heavy rubber sewer pipe is bolted underneath, water and electric power connected, the television antenna raised, and the family is in residence. The park men charge a small ground rent plus fees for water and electricity. Telephones are connected in nearly all of them simply by plugging in a jack.

If a plant or a factory closes down, you're not trapped with property you can't sell. Suppose the husband has a job and is buying a house and there's a layoff. The value goes out of his house. But if he has a mobile home he rents a trucking service and moves on and he hasn't lost anything. He may never have to do it, but the fact that he can is a comfort to him.

The first impression forced on me was that permanence is neither achieved nor desired by mobile people. They do not buy for the generations, but only until a new model they can afford comes out. [When the children marry] The mother-in-law problem is abated because the new daughter has a privacy she never had and a place of her own in which to build the structure of a family. When they move away, and nearly all Americans move away, or want to, they do not leave unused and therefore useless rooms. Relations between the generations are greatly improved. The son is a guest when he visits the parents' house, and the parents are guests in the son's house.

One of our most treasured feelings concerns roots, growing up rooted in some soil or some community. How did they feel about raising their children without roots? Was it good or bad? Would they miss it or not?

The father answered me. "How many people today have what you are talking about? What roots are there in an apartment twelve floors up? What roots are in a housing development of hundreds and thousands of small dwellings almost exactly alike?

My father came from Italy," he said. "He grew up in Tuscany in a house where his family had lived maybe a thousand years. That's roots for you, no running water, no toilet, and they cooked with charcoal or vine clippings. They had just two rooms, a kitchen and a bedroom where everybody slept, grandpa, father and all the kids, no place to read, no place to be alone, and never had had. Was that better? I bet if you gave my old man the choice he'd cut his roots and live like this. Fact is, he cut his roots away and came to America.

Now you take my wife. She's Irish descent. Her people had roots too."

"In a peat bog," the wife said. "And lived on potatoes."

"Don't you miss some kind of permanence?"

"Who's got permanence? Factory closes down, you move on. You got roots you sit and starve. You take the pioneers in the history books. They were movers. Take up land, sell it, move on. How many kids in America stay in the place where they were born, if they can get out?"

"Suppose the place I work goes broke," the husband said. "I got to move where there's a job. I get to my job in three minutes. You want I should drive twenty miles because I got roots?"

Could it be that Americans are a restless people, a mobile people, never satisfied with where they are as a matter of selection? The pioneers, the immigrants who peopled the continent, were the restless ones in Europe. The steady rooted ones stayed home and are still there. But every one of us, except the Negroes forced here as slaves, are descended from the restless ones, the wayward ones who were not content to stay at home. Wouldn't it be unusual if we had not inherited this tendency? And the fact is that we have.

But that's the short view. What are roots and how long have we had them? Our remote ancestors moved with the food supply, then they domesticated some animals, following the grass that fed their flocks. Only when agriculture came into practice – and that's not very long ago in terms of the whole history – did a place achieve meaning and value, and permanence. Roots were in the ownership of land, but in this view, we are a restless species with a very short history of roots. Perhaps we have overrated roots as a psychic need. Maybe the deeper and more ancient is the need, the will, the hunger to be somewhere else.

*Ross Larson, "WHO WANTS A JOB IF IT MEANS MOVING?" Prague Post, 1996*

While the area of Louny in north Bohemia suffers from one of the highest unemployment levels in the country, construction companies have brought in hundreds of Polish and Ukranian workers due to a lack of qualified workers in the area.

To outsiders, the solution to the Czech Republic's regional unemployment problems may seem ridiculously simple — move the unemployed to where the jobs are.

Not so simple, say experts on Czech society, labor and housing. From the countryside to the city, the unemployed would rather stay put and hope the jobs come back. In addition to a lack of new housing, the experts also blame rent controls and old habits. These habits include deep social connection to family and home soil for the vast majority of workers who simply will not move, even if it means better jobs or jobs at all.

"People are not used to moving job to another," said Martin Macha, head of the Institute for Labor and Social Affairs. "It used to be that you start to work in one factory and you work there all your life. People are not used to moving so easily and leaving friends and relatives behind."

"A lot of people could find a better job, but they prefer to stay in a worse job in the same place. This is a social relationship issue. All of Europe is less mobile than America, but this country is particularly immobile," said Anderle.

A study by the social affairs institute bears him out. This study — which questioned job seekers, people with secure work, the unemployed and people whose jobs are threatened — found that in every category, between 56 and 60 percent say they would never move from where they live for any reason. Among the unemployed, 77 percent said the thought of moving somewhere else just for work is simply unacceptable. Only 10 percent said they

w  
o  
u  
l  
d

w  
i  
l  
l  
i  
n  
g  
l  
y

m  
o  
v  
e

f  
o  
r

w  
o  
r