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Document A

Sinclair Lewis, *Babbitt* (New York: Grosset & Dunlap, 1922), 181-184

“ ‘Our Ideal Citizen—I picture him first and foremost as being busier than a bird-dog, not wasting a lot of good time in day-dreaming or going to sassiety teas or kicking about things that are none of his business, but putting the zip into some store or profession or art. At night he lights up a good cigar, and climbs into the little old ‘bus, and maybe cusses the carburetor, and shoots out home. He mows the lawn, or sneaks in some practice putting, and then he’s ready for dinner. After dinner he tells the kiddies a story, or takes the family to the movies, or plays a few fists of bridge, or reads the evening paper, and a chapter or two of some good lively Western novel if he has a taste for literature, and maybe the folks next-door drop in and they sit and visit about their friends and the topics of the day. Then he goes happily to bed, his conscience clear, having contributed his mite to the prosperity of the city and to his own bank-account.

“In politics and religion this Sane Citizen is the canniest man on earth; and in the arts he invariably has a natural taste which makes him pick out the best, every time. In no country in the world will you find so many reproductions of the Old Masters and of well-known paintings on parlor walls as in these United States. No country has anything like our number of phonographs, with not only dance records and comic but also the best operas, such as Verdi, rendered by the world’s highest-paid singers.

“ ‘In other countries, art and literature are left to a lot of shabby bums living in attics and feeding on booze and spaghetti, but in America the successful writer or picture-painter is indistinguishable from any other decent business man; and I, for one, am only too glad that the man who has the rare skill to season his message with interesting reading matter and who shows both purpose and pep in handling his literary wares has a chance to drag down his fifty thousand bucks a year, to mingle with the biggest executives on terms of perfect equality, and to show as big a house and as swell a car as any Captain of Industry! But, mind you, it’s the appreciation of the Regular Guy who I have been depicting which has made this possible, and you got to hand as much credit to him as to the authors themselves.

“ ‘Finally, but most important, our Standardized Citizen, even if he is a bachelor, is a lover of the Little Ones, a supporter of the hearthstone which is the basic foundation of our civilization, first, last, and all the time, and the thing that most distinguishes us from the decayed nations of Europe.

“ ‘I have never yet toured Europe—and as a matter of fact, I don’t know that I care to such an awful lot, as long as there’s our own mighty cities and mountains to be seen—but, the way I figure it out, there must be a good many of our own sort of folks abroad. Indeed, one of the most enthusiastic Rotarians I ever met boosted the tenets of one-hundred-per-cent pep in a burr that smacked o’ bonny Scutlond and all ye bonny braes o’ Bobby Burns. But same time, one thing that distinguishes us from our good brothers, the hustlers over there, is that they’re willing to take a lot off the snobs and journalists and politicians, while the modern American

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40 business man knows how to talk right up for himself, knows how to make it good and plenty clear that he intends to run the works. He doesn't have to call in some highbrow hired-man when it's necessary for him to answer the crooked critics of the sane and efficient life. He's not dumb, like the old-fashioned merchant. He's got a vocabulary and a punch.

45 “ ‘With all modesty, I want to stand up here as a representative business man and gently whisper, “Here's our kind of folks! Here's the specifications of the Standardized American Citizen! Here's the new generation of Americans: fellows with hair on their chests and smiles in their eyes and adding-machines in their offices. We're not doing any boasting, but we like ourselves first-rate, and if you don't like us, look out—better get under cover before the cyclone hits town!”

50 “ ‘So! In my clumsy way I have tried to sketch the Real He-man, the fellow with Zip and Bang. And it's because Zenith has so large a proportion of such men that it's the most stable, the greatest of our cities. New York also has its thousands of Real Folks, but New York is cursed with unnumbered foreigners. So are Chicago and San Francisco. Oh, we have a golden roster of cities—Detroit and Cleveland with their renowned factories, Cincinnati with its great machine-tool and soap products, Pittsburg and Birmingham with their steel, Kansas City and Minneapolis and Omaha that open their bountiful gates on the bosom of the ocean-like wheatlands, and countless other magnificent sister-cities, for, by the last census, there were no less than sixty-eight glorious American burghs with a population of over one hundred thousand! And all these cities stand together for power and purity, and against foreign ideas and communism—Atlanta with Hartford, Rochester with Denver, Milwaukee with Indianapolis, Los Angeles with Scranton, Portland, Maine, with Portland, Oregon. A good live wire from Baltimore or Seattle or Duluth is the twin-brother of every like fellow booster from Buffalo or Akron, Fort Worth or Oskaloosa!

65 “ ‘But it's here in Zenith, the home for manly men and womanly women and bright kids, that you find the largest proportion of these Regular Guys, and that's what sets it in a class by itself; that's why Zenith will be remembered in history as having set the pace for a civilization that shall endure when the old time-killing ways are gone forever and the day of earnest efficient endeavor shall have dawned all round the world!

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Document B

Robert Staughton Lynd and Helen Merrel Lynd, *Middletown: A Study in Contemporary American Culture*. (New York: Harcourt, Brace and Company, 1929 [1956]), 3-7.

Nature of the investigation

The aim of the field investigation recorded in the following pages was to study synchronously the interwoven trends that are the life of a small American city. A typical city, strictly speaking, does not exist, but the city studied was selected as having many features common to a wide group of communities. Neither field work nor report has attempted to prove any thesis; the aim has been, rather, to record observed phenomena, thereby raising questions and suggesting possible fresh points of departure in the study of group behavior.

The stubborn resistance which “social problems” offer may be related in part to the common habit of piecemeal attack upon them. Students of human behavior are recognizing increasingly, however, that “the different aspects of civilization interlock and intertwine, presenting—in a word—a continuum.” The present investigation, accordingly, set out to approach the life of the people in the city selected as a unit complex of interwoven trends of behavior.

Two major difficulties present themselves at the outset of such a total-situation study of a contemporary civilization: *first*, the danger, never wholly avoidable, of not being completely objective in viewing a culture in which one’s life is imbedded, of falling into the old error of starting out, despite oneself, with emotionally weighted presuppositions and consequently failing ever to get outside the field one set out so bravely to objectify and study; and, *second*, granted that no one phase of living can be adequately understood without a study of all the rest, how is one to set about the investigation of anything as multifarious as the gross-total thing that is Schenectady, Akron, Dallas, or Keokuk?

A clew to the securing both of the maximum objectivity and of some kind of orderly procedure in such a maze may be found in the approach of the cultural anthropologist. There are, after all, despite infinite variations in detail, not so many major kinds of things that people do. Whether in an Arunta village in Central Australia or in our own seemingly intricate institutional life of corporations, dividends, coming-out parties, prayer meetings, freshmen, and Congress, human behavior appears to consist in variations upon a few major lines of activity: getting the material necessities for food, clothing, shelter; mating; initiating the young into the group habits of thought and behavior; and so on. This study, accordingly, proceeds on the assumption that all the things people do in this American city may be viewed as falling under one or another of the following six main-trunk activities:

- Getting a living.
- Making a home.
- Training the young.
- Using leisure in various forms of play, art, and so on.
- Engaging in religious practices.
- Engaging in community activities.

This particular grouping of activities is used with no idea of its exclusive merit but simply as a methodological expedient. [...]

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40 **The City Selected**

The city will be called Middletown. A community as small as thirty-odd thousand affords at best about as much privacy as Irvin Cobb's celebrated goldfish enjoyed, and it has not seemed desirable to increase this high visibility in the discussion of local conditions by singling out the city by its actual name.

45 There were no ulterior motives in the selection of Middletown. It was not consulted about the project, and no organization or person in the city contributed anything to the cost of the investigation. Two main considerations guided the selection of a location for the study: (1) that the city be as representative as possible of contemporary American life, and (2) that it be at the same time compact and homogeneous enough to be manageable in such a total-situation
50 study.

In line with the first of these considerations the following characteristics were considered desirable: (1) A temperate climate. (2) A sufficiently rapid rate of growth to insure the presence of a plentiful assortment of the growing pains accompanying contemporary social change. (3) An industrial culture with modern, high-speed machine production. (4) The
55 absence of dominance of the city's industry by a single plant, i.e., not a one-industry town. (5) A substantial local artistic life to balance its industrial activity; also a largely self-contained artistic life, e.g., not that of a college town in which the college imports the community's music and lectures. (6) The absence of any outstanding peculiarities or acute local problems which would mark it off from the mid-channel sort of American community. After further
60 consideration, a seventh qualification was added: the city should, if possible, be in that common-denominator of America, the Middle West. Two streams of colonists met in this middle region of the United States: "The Yankees from New England and New York came by way of the Erie Canal into northern Ohio. . . . The southern stream of colonists, having passed through the Cumberland Gap into Kentucky, went down the Ohio River." With the first of
65 these came also a foreign-born stock, largely from Great Britain, Ireland, and Germany.

In order to secure a certain amount of compactness and homogeneity, the following characteristics were sought: (1) A city of the 25,000–50,000 group. This meant selection from among a possible 143 cities, according to the 1920 Census. A city of this size, it was felt, would be large enough to have put on long trousers and to take itself seriously, and yet small
70 enough to be studied from many aspects as a unit. (2) A city as nearly self-contained as is possible in this era of rapid and pervasive inter-communication, not a satellite city. (3) A small Negro and foreign-born population.

Document C

Grant Wood, *The Birthplace Of Herbert Hoover, West Branch, Iowa*, 1931
Oil on composition board, H.29-5/8 x W.39-3/4 in.

