

SOCIAL BEHAVIOR AND PERSONALITY<sup>1</sup>

IN HIS Foreword to this volume, Donald Young remarks upon the fact that W. I. Thomas was unconcerned with his personal role in the development of modern social science and did nothing whatever to assure for himself a niche in the Hall of Fame: he left behind no autobiography, no "collected works," no "General Theory." SOCIAL BEHAVIOR AND PERSONALITY is an effort to do for him what he neglected to do for himself. It is the outgrowth of an offer by Dorothy Swaine Thomas to turn over to the Social Science Research Council all the rights in the publications and manuscripts of W. I. Thomas. A Committee appointed by the Council is responsible for the present work, although the actual preparation of the manuscript was done by Edmund H. Volkhart.

The book opens with an introductory chapter in which Volkhart analyzes the central interests and theoretical concepts of Thomas, and which provides a sort of summary of the points that are subsequently documented by extensive quotations from Thomas' published and unpublished writings. With few exceptions (e.g., "The Four Wishes") the various materials are ordered in terms of current concepts and problems. Thus there are chapters on "The Behavior Pattern and the Situation," "Configurations of Personality," "Social Disorganization," and "Personality and Culture." Through such classification of the various things that Thomas had to say on a given matter, his writings are, in a sense, brought "up-to-date" without distorting them. By careful and copious footnote reference to subsequent writers, Volkhart repeatedly demonstrates how great—if not always recognized—their debt is to Thomas. A complete bibliography of Thomas' published works and an exceedingly brief and uninformative Biographical Note, complete the book.

Thomas began writing in *The American Journal of Sociology* in 1899, when that now-august journal was but four years old (and this reviewer not quite born); his last published article appeared in the same journal in 1939. In the forty years between sociology, and indeed the social sciences as a whole, grew

<sup>1</sup> SOCIAL BEHAVIOR AND PERSONALITY: CONTRIBUTIONS OF W. I. THOMAS TO THEORY AND SOCIAL RESEARCH. Edited and Annotated by Edmund H. Volkhart. New York: The Social Science Research Council, 1951. ix, 338 pp. \$3.00.

up and came of age. It seems reasonably safe to say that no other single man contributed more to that growth than Thomas. Some, like Ross, made considerably more noise; some, like Park, secured more disciples. But none of his generation excelled Thomas in intellectual curiosity, originality, clarity of expression, and sheer staying power. Thomas' interests were wide. He wrote on many topics; e.g., fashion, race prejudice, and methodology. From the outset of his career, however, he evidenced two dominant concerns: the use of data from primitive societies for comparative purposes, and the role of the female in both primitive and modern society. To some extent *THE POLISH PEASANT IN EUROPE AND AMERICA*, for which he is perhaps most noted, was a digression. But whatever the problem, Thomas invariably approached it in a direct and forthright fashion. His interest was people, their behavior and the causes thereof, and to this study he brought both insight and a degree of sympathetic understanding equalled only by that of Cooley. As a result, his concerns and concepts are sociopsychological rather than sociological; he deals with individuals and classes of individuals rather than social processes and the forms of social organization. When, thus, he discusses social change it is not at that exceedingly high level of abstraction which is characterized by the social lag concept but, rather, at the lower—and at least to this reviewer more meaningful—level of those social and psychological factors that foster innovation and those which retard adoption of new devices and procedures.

The concept of the "four wishes" is perhaps the most widely known and most discussed of those advanced by Thomas. It runs through much that he wrote, and it is clear from the selections provided in this volume that Thomas himself considered the concept one of his major contributions. But it is also evident that, in his later years at least, the concept was a methodological tool; a means of ordering data, rather than an explanation for those data. To explain behavior he relies mainly on the situation concept or, as he termed it, the "definition of the situation." His last book, *PRIMITIVE BEHAVIOR*, is, in fact, a massive demonstration of the varied definitions that different peoples make of situations. It is probably this concept, which is now thoroughly incorporated in sociopsychological theory,

rather than that of the four wishes, for which Thomas will be longest remembered.

**SOCIAL BEHAVIOR AND PERSONALITY** is far more than a memorial volume. Volkhart's analysis of Thomas' concepts, the meaningful way in which the selections have been organized, the inclusion of previously unpublished materials, and the inherent value of the subject matter, combine to make this book a useful contribution to the literature of social psychology as well as an addition to the personal stature of W. I. Thomas.

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### DEMOGRAPHY<sup>1</sup>

ACCORDING to the author, "This book has been written mainly to provide a connected account of the principles and methods employed in the study of population for actuarial students and for all who are concerned with population statistics" (v). His purposeful restriction of the book to methodology is evinced at the outset by the statement "Where demography impinges upon the social sciences, on economics and on politics, due reference is made to the fact, but the subject is not pursued out of its natural limits into these tempting byways" (vi).

The book contains fifteen chapters, an addendum concerning the Report of the Royal Commission on Population, and three annexes giving census data for England, Wales, and Scotland. Throughout the book, as one might expect, the author relies mainly upon British materials for his examples and exposition of technique. This feature may make the book somewhat less attractive than it otherwise might be to teachers of demography in other countries. Nevertheless, the book probably will be used fairly widely in classrooms in non-British countries simply because of its merits as an able, scholarly, concise, and lucid exposition of the principles and methods of demography.

Following an introductory discussion of the scope and historical aspects of demography, are chapters on census enumera-

<sup>1</sup> COX, Peter R.: **DEMOGRAPHY**, London and New York, Cambridge University Press, 1950, 326 pp., 20 shillings (\$4.00 in U. S.).