

AS
YOU
SOW

WALTER GOLDSCHMIDT

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FOR GALE

PREFACE

FROM INDUSTRIALIZED sowing of the soil is reaped an urbanized rural society. This is the lesson which the present study teaches us. Many changes in social relationships and in the functioning of social institutions—sometimes subtle, sometimes blatant—are the component parts of this urbanization, and an intelligent planning for the future of rural society must recognize the import and content of this transformation.

Both in popular thought and in sociological doctrine, rural life has been set apart from that of the city. Rural ties are said to be closer; face-to-face contacts are said to dominate social relationships. The individual is said to be evaluated in terms of his own true worth. Rural institutions are said to derive from common needs and not only serve them but serve also to integrate the society and unite its members. Sometimes less laudatory features are pointed out. Rural people are said to be backward, naturally cautious, and individualistic, less educated and less concerned with progress. A livelihood is said to satisfy their wants.

The present volume shows that these generalizations do not hold for California rural society. In the California community which is the subject of this study, social ties are not close, invidious social distinctions are maintained without reference to personal qualities. Most institutions serve to maintain these distinctions rather than to destroy them for the sake of common interest. On the other hand, the people are neither backward nor uneducated, but are interested in progress in the way that concept is usually understood in American society. They are a part of that society, and not a separate entity.

This is a community study, but whether it is the study of communities depends upon our definition of that concept. For our data show, as intimated above, that the town and its surrounding rural population form a community only in the politi-

cal sense. The ties which bind the individuals living in this area are subservient to the ties of social classes and cliques which are at all times dominant. It is this fact more than any other which compels us to consider the rural community as urbanized, and which makes us loath to consider it a community in that sense of the term which implies social unity and homogeneity. Remnants of community life remain, to be sure, but when they are brought under closer scrutiny it is clear that they serve but a segment of the population which dwells in the area.

A few general statements will serve to orient the reader. The community of Wasco is an unincorporated town of over 4,000 persons, while perhaps another 4,000 live in the immediate vicinity. It lies on the floor of the Great Central Valley of California, near its southern end. The land which is now so rich and fruitful was once desert, reclaimed to man's more urgent uses by the gasoline, electric, and Diesel pumps which lift the water from the underground table. Save for an unimpressive oil field near by, it is dependent entirely for its resources on the products of its soil. The people are mostly native whites who have come to California from the Middle West during the last thirty-five years. Many of these are of German descent. There are also a number of Canadians. Aside from the native whites, there are substantial colonies of Mexicans and Negroes. The Mexicans have been present since the very beginning of the community; the Negro colony developed shortly after the first World War. These groups have their own communities; yet they are also a part of the whole, and it is in this latter aspect that they appear in our study.

The detailed information on Wasco is given a broader meaning through the analysis of two similar neighboring towns, Dinuba and Arvin. The study of these latter communities was made after the analysis of Wasco was completed, and it was therefore possible to check the conclusions reached there.

At the outset we made the hypothesis that the nature of the economy is the causative factor which sets off Wasco from the rural community as more commonly conceived. Industrializa-

tion has changed farming enterprise from a livelihood to a means of achieving wealth. Diversification, the drudgery of the farm yard, self-sufficiency are gone and in their stead is the single cash crop grown at high cost in the ever-present expectation of large profits. This means on one hand the need for large groups of farm laborers and on the other the interest of large commercial enterprises in the farming community. These are the elements which make for the breakdown of the old community and for the development of urbanized social relationships.

The factors which make for these new relationships are widespread in California; indeed, they are characteristic of California's agriculture. Furthermore, it has been found that these factors are appearing in other parts of the United States; that industrialized farming is spreading rapidly. Obviously such areas within and outside of California have not and will not produce communities identical to Wasco. But it is clear that those essential characteristics of the three California towns analyzed, and which we have subsumed under the term *urbanization*, are generally associated with industrial agriculture. While Wasco displays these characteristics admirably, we can see the nature of the divergence by the variations presented in Arvin and Dinuba. The causative relationship between industrialized agriculture and urbanized society, we feel, is established in this study, and insofar as this is the case, the basic characteristics of the latter may be expected wherever the former develops.

The implications of this thesis do not, therefore, end at California's borders. Nor do they extend only as far as industrialization has already been found. Mechanization and industrialized production will inevitably come to dominate the rural scene in all America. Neither wishful thinking nor nostalgic legislation will prevent this course of events. To those who look backward, this trend presents a doleful picture. But such a view is not justified. Though the traditional has its endearing charms, it is not without its costs, while urban society has much to commend it. The importance lies, however, in the recognition both of the possible dangers and the inherent values of an urbanized rural

society. It is not impossible to salvage the good from tradition and still capture the best that technological efficiency has to offer. But if we are to accomplish this a realistic view must be taken; reality must replace stereotype. The traditional bases for farm policy must be reviewed in terms of the future social picture in rural America. Because the society of Wasco and her sister communities point up the character of that future rural scene, an attempt has been made in the closing chapters to indicate some of the broader implications that Wasco has, and to outline the necessary elements for American agricultural policy.

This study is a case history. It is the result of eight months' study as participant observers in Wasco and a month each in the two other towns. We—my wife and I—made every effort to participate in Wasco society on that level which might be considered normal for persons of our background. We joined in community meetings, school functions, and club affairs; we attended churches and fraternized with as many groups as we could. Furthermore, interviews were held with persons of all walks of life, with emphasis either upon the historical or developmental aspects of the town, or upon that person's relationships to the community. All available and pertinent statistical material was examined, membership lists were analyzed, and many chance observations and unsolicited remarks were recorded. Similar techniques were used in Arvin and Dinuba in addition to specific statistical information collected.

The visit in Wasco started in the fall of 1940 and lasted into the following summer; the visits to Arvin and Dinuba were made during the spring of 1944. Data collected in the field refer, therefore, to those periods unless otherwise specified.

In the course of our visits many close bonds were developed. Some persons knew rather precisely the nature of the investigation, others vaguely that it was an historical study or falsely one of many romantic notions, and most—such is the urbanity of these towns—nothing whatsoever of the study. To these friends and strangers we are permanently indebted, and from them we have quoted liberally in the hope that thus we may better interpret their, and our, society.

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