

I

# THE SPIRIT OF AMERICA IN THE WAR

II

# INDEPENDENCE DAY ADDRESS

*By*

DAVID F. SWENSON

*Professor of Philosophy in the University of Minnesota*

MINNEAPOLIS, MINNESOTA

July, 1918.



# THE SPIRIT OF AMERICA IN THE WAR

## NATURE AND PURPOSE OF ARTICLE

What are the motives and underlying aims which have impelled the American people to become active participants in a world war which they have from the beginning looked upon as an unexampled calamity? And what attitude do American citizens of Swedish birth or ancestry take toward such participation? These are the questions which the writer has set himself to answer in the following statement.

An expression of this character, involving as it does a judgment on contemporary persons and events, is not a mere impersonal analysis or an abstract development of ideas. It is a personal responsibility, and therefore it is just that the reader should know something of the antecedents and the outlook of the person whose conviction is herein expressed.

## THE WRITER'S ANTECEDENTS AND OUTLOOK

The writer was born in Sweden and came with his parents to America as a child of six. His parents were steerage immigrants, in common with so many others impelled and buoyed by the hope of bettering their condition. So far as they were personally concerned, this hope was scarcely fulfilled. They found conditions of life in the new world not easier, and perhaps even somewhat harder, than in the

old. I mention this fact because it is a more typical circumstance than is generally recognized. But what life had denied to the parents, it granted in generous measure to the children. America afforded them, in spite of initial hardship and poverty, an education beyond the elementary, and she gave them the possibility of modest careers as students and teachers. This fact constitutes a natural bond of affection that lends added strength and vitality to the ties of loyalty and duty which bind them to their adopted country.

My roots are therefore firmly planted in American soil. My political loyalty is undivided; it is wholly unthinkable that there could be any question of that. But I have never seen fit to apologize for my Swedish ancestry nor sought to avoid any of its natural implications. I have consistently taught and professed that the foreign born in America need not cut themselves off from the heritage of art and of thought, of literature and culture, which is theirs by virtue of race and tradition. I have always believed that much of this inheritance may and of right ought to be used to enrich American life, and that if we foreign born are true to ourselves both as American citizens of undivided allegiance, and as of this or that ancestry and culture, we may render a useful and most important service to the country of our adoption. I have not only taught this view of our duty and opportunity, but within my own field, and in proportion to my powers, I have practised what I have preached; I have given lectures and courses of instruction intended to stimulate interest in those representative leaders of philosophical thought which the Scandinavian countries have given to the world.

I have never been enamored of war. While I have never joined any pacifist society, nor taken part in any of the numerous movements to abolish war which have been so characteristic of recent humanitarian thought and effort, I have never believed, nor do I now believe, that naked and unspiritualized force can ever by itself determine any ideal issue, or promote any ideal cause. I am far from regarding

peace as an end in itself, or as absolutely valuable under any and all circumstances, looking upon war rather as a symptom of a deeper seated evil than as itself the fundamental disease. Nevertheless, I have always used such influence as I possessed in favor of a peaceful settlement of controversies, international or otherwise. I heartily share the feeling and conviction of President Wilson, that no community can call itself civilized for which war is not a last and most regrettable resort, and that a highminded people will endure many injuries and suffer much injustice before it sees fit to take up arms.

I am not unmindful, to make a last reference to my personal attitude, of the subtle and insidious change which creeps over the minds and judgments of men, when the country which rightfully commands their love and allegiance comes to be engaged in bloody conflict with an enemy. I have not been an observer of this war for the first three years of its course, without noting how even scholars and thinkers, sages and scientists and moralists alike, lose the power of seeing things as they are, and of viewing events and persons in the dry light of disinterested truth, as soon as they perceive that momentous issues are at stake, reaching the depths of their patriotic feeling. I cannot hope wholly to escape this influence; but I am at least alive to the danger and earnestly desirous of attaining the greatest possible objectivity of judgment.

#### THE STATE OF AMERICAN OPINION

So much for myself and my viewpoint. But what of America and the war? Is America united or divided? Is it in earnest, or is its participation in the war a mere formality, a sort of payment for a ticket-of-admission to the peace conference? Is it determined to endure to the end, or will it weaken at the first prospect of serious reverse? And above all, how does America intend to utilize the victory which it hopes with its associates in the war to gain, and for which it is determined to do all and sacrifice all? These are questions.

to which no thoughtful American ought to lack for an answer; and the present writer has strong convictions regarding them.

In the beginning, in 1914, American opinion was not solidified. Nevertheless, the general trend of our sympathies as a people soon became unmistakable. Many of us had long been aware of the peculiar recrudescence of military feeling and military philosophy which the ruling classes of Germany had yielded themselves to serve and to embody. This philosophy and this feeling is present everywhere, among all peoples; not even my own country is free from it.

#### CONTRAST BETWEEN ALLIED AND GERMAN POLICY BEFORE THE WAR

But in America as in England and in France, opinion was strongly setting its face in the opposite direction: toward efforts to remove the causes of war; to reduce the number of occasions on which war might honorably be declared; to minimize the horrors and brutalities incident to warfare; and to increase the existing humanitarian restraints upon the conduct of war. And this opinion was reflected in the diplomacy and the governmental action of the respective countries.

The effective ruling opinion in Germany had a different trend. It deliberately attempted to idealize war; it consciously sought to increase the number of its recognized justifications; and it worked to increase its horrors and brutalities and to relax its humanitarian restraints, in order to make it more effective as a weapon of decision. This opinion was faithfully reflected in Germany's diplomacy, in her military morale, in the standards of her officer caste, and in her governmental action. And all this was placed in the service of a perfervid national ambition, an overweening pride in the rulers, and an almost unquestioning obedience in the ruled. Is it any wonder that even before the war many of us had recognized in this phenomenon an anachronism menacing to the peace and progress of the world?

## HOW OUR SYMPATHIES WERE ALIENATED

The events which preceded and accompanied the declarations of war had a cumulative and progressive effect in alienating our sympathies from the German power and program. The impossible ultimatum which Austria imposed upon Serbia; the nullification of every effort toward mediation by Germany's calculated indifference, delay, and hostility; the imperative demands and prompt declarations of war sent forth from Berlin while there still seemed ample time for peaceable settlements—all this created a most painful impression. We saw how this great and aggressive power, having all the initial advantages of preparation and available resource, nevertheless affected to be in such imminent and deadly peril that it could afford to be bound by no sacred word and no solemn treaty. We saw it attack and demolish a weak neighbor whom it had sworn to protect, in order to add, at the expense of honor and justice, one more advantage to the many which it already possessed over its enemies. Is it any wonder if our sympathies grew cold?

A little later, worse things were brought to our attention, things so terrible that we were loth to believe them. And when we saw the methods of warfare of which Germany stood accused frankly defended by her writers and military authorities, and her treatment of civilians in conquered territories explained as a necessary consequence of a really methodical and scientific system of war, we stood aghast, and felt ourselves to be in the presence of something not wholly human. Our antipathies were aroused; and as time went on, and evidence was added to evidence and confirmation made doubly sure, these antipathies were strengthened and deepened.

## OUR OWN INJURIES AT GERMANY'S HANDS

But these were injuries to others, not to ourselves. Remembering those limitations which are imposed upon all human activity, individual and collective, we sought to maintain our neutrality of action, if not of thought and feeling.

But in the meanwhile, Germany made preposterous demands upon us. She urged that we ought to help her by neutralizing Great Britain's command of the seas, preventing our citizens from trading in war materials with the Allies. And because we insisted upon exercising our undoubted right, and did not see fit to interpret our duty and our interest so as to aid in the realization of Germany's ambitions, German agents, financed by funds made available through regularly accredited diplomatic and military representatives of the Central Powers, plotted to blow up our factories and foment disturbances and violence in our industries. They conspired to violate our laws while openly professing to be our friends and actually enjoying the benefits of our hospitality. They sought by every means in their power to embroil us in war with our neighbors to the south and with our neighbor across the Pacific. And when we refused to give up our right to safety of life and limb upon the high seas, German naval captains deliberately murdered our citizens who were engaged in the exercise of a right which international law has from the beginning never failed to assert. And yet we did not go to war. We had no intention of renouncing those minimal rights which symbolized for us some degree of humanitarian restraint upon the conduct of war, in the face of aggression by a power whose cruelty had alienated our sympathies, but we hoped against hope that better counsels might prevail and that the injuries of which we had cause to complain might cease.

But that hope had finally to be abandoned. Germany announced, as a settled policy, the violation of international law to the injury of the lives of neutrals and noncombatants upon the high seas; and weeks before the announcement was made, prepared officially to incite Mexico and Japan to make war upon us. Our patience was at an end. I know of no major power, able to wage war in defense of its undoubted rights, which could have failed to take up the challenge thus laid down. I know of only one standpoint from which America's assumption of the status of a belligerent could under

the circumstances be consistently criticized, and no neutral or belligerent power in the world today occupies that standpoint, nor does any statesman in any American or European state.

#### THE AMERICAN PEOPLE UNITED AND DETERMINED

In one sense, the American people did not will the war. They were profoundly reluctant to enter upon it, and this reluctance had its ground not only in a love for peace, but also in a distrust of the arbitrament of war as a means of securing justice. But when the time came for a final decision, they accepted and perceived the necessity for war with astonishing unanimity. And having entered upon it, they cannot lightly be swerved from their purpose.

Let no one be deceived into thinking that any individual, or any interested clique, plunged us into war. No one who asserts this can lay claim to the slightest intelligent knowledge of American affairs. President Wilson is perhaps the most independent of all the characters now playing a part in the world's statesmanship, and there is no coterie, in the country or out of it, that could force him to serve its purpose. But President Wilson has a most remarkable sense of the common will and mind; when by the exercise of his leadership he restrained the nation from entrance upon a premature war, and when he later led the nation into a war which was felt to be unavoidable—in both of these acts of leadership he faithfully interpreted the common mind of the great mass of American citizens.

Whatever strangeness may have been felt, and whatever misunderstandings may have existed in the minds of some parts of our population upon finding themselves in the unwonted position of taking part in what seemed superficially to be a merely European conflict, has rapidly disappeared. There has been a wonderful amalgamation of feeling and unification of sentiment behind the war aims enunciated by President Wilson, and this movement has included within its scope the most diverse elements of our population.

The president's aims are America's aims. There are indeed a handful of dissentients (and what wonder?) to the right and to the left. There are those among us who care more for power than they do for justice, and who would like to use the war to further imperialistic aims; and there are those on the other hand who see in peace the only justice. But the great mass of the American people are determined to keep America true to the cause we have so often and so clearly proclaimed. They are determined to utilize the victory for the sake of which we are straining every nerve and devoting every resource, in order thereby to secure a juster relationship between peoples and a more peaceful organization of the international community. And their determination to endure to the end is all the firmer for having its ground in a purpose that is thus universal, and not merely private or individual.

AMERICA'S AIMS HEARTILY EMBRACED BY HER CITIZENS OF  
SWEDISH ORIGIN

Is it possible that any person of Swedish blood, in this country or in Sweden, can have anything to fear from such a victory, utilized in such a spirit? All peoples stand to gain, so it seems to me, the peoples of neutral countries not the least. We do not intend to allow ourselves to be carried away by the passions of rancor or revenge, but we regard the overweening ambitions and militaristic outlook of the German rulers as threatening to the world, and we intend to do all in our power to avert the menace of the one and to destroy the prestige of the other.

We are interested in the Russian democracy. We desire to see Russia free to work out her experiments in selfgovernment and her new ideals of industrial organization, and we intend to use our influence to make this possible. It surely needs no argument from me to point the obvious fact that the legitimate interests of Sweden as an independent nation must necessarily be better served by a democratic Russia, preoccupied with problems of selfimprovement and loving

peace, than by a despotic Russia, intent upon a career of brigandage; or a vassal Russia, the servant of a despotic worldpower, boundless in its ambition and without scruple in its choice of means.

This understanding of the war and of the meaning of America's participation, is becoming more and more nearly universal in the ranks of American citizenship, including those of Swedish descent. As a consequence, the loyalty of the latter, which from the beginning was prompt and unquestionable, is becoming more and more a matter of hearty and convinced allegiance to America's purposes, and less and less a mere matter of duty. This is something which we wish our kinsmen across the sea to know, in order that they may not misinterpret the spirit in which we dedicate our sons to service of our country's cause, a cause we love and cherish, in this tense and critical hour when we feel with agony what we hope to be the birth-pangs of a better world.

---

Written for the Committee on Public Information for translation into Swedish, to be circulated as American propaganda in Sweden; first published in The Minneapolis Journal, Sunday, May 19, 1918.

## II.

# INDEPENDENCE DAY ADDRESS

FELLOW AMERICANS OF SWEDISH ORIGIN:

The national holiday which we celebrate today is our holiday. It does not belong to us in any narrow or selfish or exclusive sense, in any sense in which it could not rightfully be claimed by any other of the groups or individuals, native-born or foreign-born, that together constitute this great nation. But it belongs to us in exactly the same sense, and in the same degree; and we are met today to claim it as ours. That claim is one which it is the duty and the privilege of each and every one of us to make good. The child in school, who sometimes feels himself more truly at home in the company of playmates and teachers than in his own home, where Swedish-speaking parents exert the dominant influence, parents whose language and whose ways begin to seem more and more strange to him—it is his Fourth of July as a matter of course. The aged couple whose ears refuse quickly to catch the new accents, whose hearts are but slowly warmed by the hardly understood words of the new language, and whose lips still instinctively formulate the prayers learned at mother's knee in the old familiar tongue—it is none the less their Fourth of July; and may no one be so stupid or so cruel as to assume to take it from them. For we

are citizens, all of us, of our adopted country; and the reality of our citizenship is not to be tested by the duration of our residence here, or by the fluency of our English speech; but rather by the depth of our loyalty, and the fervor of our devotion, and the enthusiasm of our patriotism, and the unselfishness of our love of country. It is by virtue of participation in such things as these that we claim today our right in this Independence Day.

This claim of ours is no empty claim, no abstract theory, no conventional phrase. It is a testimony woven into the fiber of our being, and embedded in every natural feeling and emotion. A thousand voices of the heart attest its sincerity; a thousand vital experiences give it depth and power. This national holiday is ours because this is our land. This broad expanse of cultivated prairie, these farms nestling in the valleys or hidden among the forests—have they not been won from the wilderness at the cost of our brawn and our brain? These village marketplaces, these cities teeming with industry and life—are they not built by the sweat of our brows and the labor of our hands, as well as by the sweat and the labor of our compatriots? And these churches and schools, and all the other civilizing institutions that deck these communities—are they not wrought of our hopes and our fears, our joys and our sorrows, our strivings and communings, our willing co-operation with our fellow citizens? This flag which floats above us in the breeze is our flag. It symbolizes our past and our future, our history and our hopes, and our oneness with all our fellow-citizens. Its stripes reflect in their red the blood shed by American citizens of our race on the battlefields of every war in which the Stars and Stripes have been carried to victory: the War of the Revolution, the Civil War, the Spanish-American War, and finally, the war in which we are now engaged for a greater freedom and a more adequate justice for ourselves and for humanity.

And this day is ours with a peculiar emphasis in the present crisis. It is ours because we love the cause which America has made its own, and the principles for which she

battles. We love freedom and independence, and have always loved them; and we love these treasures not only for ourselves, but for the other peoples of the world as well. We love justice and hate iniquity as between the nations, great and small. We find our inspiration in the hope of an enduring peace, when the world shall no longer be an armed camp of hatreds and suspicions, but a real international community founded on confidence and law. For these things we gladly send our sons at duty's call, to suffer and perhaps to die on foreign battlefields, in this hour of the world's agony.

And now we dedicate ourselves anew to our common country. We consecrate ourselves to a deeper and a purer loyalty, to a broader and a more whole-hearted patriotism. We bind ourselves to a patriotism that shall be inclusive and not exclusive, a patriotism that turns upon no loyal citizen the cold shoulder of suspicion, but extends to all the warm handclasp of a sincere and friendly welcome. We love our country in its people, native-born and foreign-born, men and women of all races and religions, loyal farmers and loyal city dwellers, brain-workers and hand-workers, skilled and unskilled, all sorts and conditions of men, embarked here upon the high enterprise of establishing a nation, *e pluribus unum*, conceived in liberty and equality under the law. We consecrate ourselves to a patriotism that shall be disinterested and unselfish, striving loyally to support our common country in the measure of our strength, not scheming to make our country support us and further our private ambitions. We pray that our loyalty may be kept pure and unsullied by party passion or selfish greed. We dedicate ourselves to serve the common good; we bind ourselves with a loyalty to the common will; to an undivided allegiance and a disinterested devotion; to an obedience that sees the majesty of the law everywhere, and not only where it serves our own interest; to a deepseated respect for the safeguards of an orderly procedure, to the end that there may be realized a cool and even-handed justice whether in

peace or war. Thus we dedicate ourselves to our country, by which we mean the deeper and permanent and common interests of our neighbors and fellow-citizens. At the same time we dedicate ourselves to the task of rearing, in the wonderful new world that is to come, when the present birth-pangs shall have ceased to trouble, a stable structure of a better human society, founded on the firm foundations of love and justice and truth. God bless America, and make her truly great among the nations of the earth!