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Editor's Note

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EDITOR'S NOTE

JOSEPH DREW

A review of the papers read at the annual meetings of the International Society for the Comparative Study of Civilizations and of those submitted to this journal shows that almost invariably our concerns address issues which are amongst those constituting the largest and broadest social analyses in history. Moreover, our studies typically, although not always refer, to the relatively distant past. This is totally appropriate for our association and for the subject matter. If any group of scholars can and should claim the right to look at the big picture, it is the civilizationalists, surely. From Toynbee to Sorokin, and from Kavolis to Melko, comparative civilizationalists take the "macro" view; they see large slices of life. That's the nature of the subject.

But I believe that there are contemporary and more specific issues which ought to attract our attention as civilizationalists as well. Perhaps we can bring better, broader, answers to trenchant problems of the contemporary age by placing them in historical and theoretical civilizational perspective. Our method of combining sociology, history, comparative literature, anthropology, philosophy, linguistics, military science and the other disciplines helps make our results valuable both theoretically and for applied purposes.

The use of comparative civilizational studies in the latter sense has not always been fully considered. But I believe that there is a tremendous need for the applied use, the application, of our work. And if at least some of us concentrate in part upon this applied work, it should not diminish in any sense the free range of thought that we pour into our theoretical studies overall.

Lately, I have been attending a number of conferences which have focused on facilitating economic growth in various regions of the world. Thus, I was present for a meeting of the highly regarded Potomac Conference, sponsored by the Board of Trade

here in Washington, several months ago. The official focus for the region's leaders who were gathered at the conference was making this region of the country "a world-class connected community." Washington has political centrality; clearly, though, it isn't yet another Athens culturally, aesthetically, artistically. The question all grappled with was how to push Greater Washington forward as a dynamic, "world-class" community.

Afterwards, I visited the island of Hawaii; there, too, one finds a community leadership which is anxious to see an economic take-off, ready for the island and region to become a center for new types of research and development. The chances for India to break through, to become a world leader first in technology and then in other aspects of modern ("Western") life, were discussed extensively during President Clinton's visit there. Egypt's President Mubarak is talking about the same for his country as are many leaders of the developing world.

Almost always, it is assumed that other aspects of greatness, of "world-class" status, follow economic growth. It is generally argued by experts here and abroad, such as Cisneros and Weiss, that with the development of a unique and innovative "cluster" of economic activity, overall progress will ensue and be significant. Look at the "Silicon Valley" of Northern California; at Austin, Texas; at the "Silicon Wadi" in Israel; at Bangalore in India; at the Republic of Ireland. For comparison, we can also study the more mixed results of the Research Triangle area of North Carolina or of Route 128 in Boston, as well. Much of the argument buttressing the Initiative for a Competitive Inner City rests upon similar studies.

But what actually facilitated the rise to cultural and creative greatness of Athens? Of Florence? Of the eras and places in which Confucius or Ashoka lived? Will capturing an economic moment, building a specific cluster of industries which occupy a new area of the global market, bring similar greatness to our region in the modern age?

Economists and other social scientists have looked at the

results of such development in the past. Now is the time for our field to present its *bona fides*, to expand into applied work. A brief review of the articles which have been published in the CCR to date show very little concern with the applied aspects of our topic. Yet with Toynbee we can compare civilizations, great societies, and through such comparisons try to show the reasons certain places and cultures, at particular times, achieved greatness of universal reach. And we can build through the use of Weberian "ideal types" models for economic, social, and cultural take-off that will be of value to economic developers in cities and regions worldwide. We can point to the solution – how to do it. I would think that the United States, where de Tocqueville noted two centuries ago the unusual concentration on practical uses of scholarship, would be the ideal center for such a movement in our discipline.

The applied uses of the comparative study of civilizations could be many. To begin with, innovative leaders could work with what the late researcher and scholar Paul Lazarsfeld called a scholarly "map". Such a map would lay out the series of practical contemporary problems and issues comparative civilization could address profitably. It would define topics for us, since the meaning of the subject is still emerging; indicate what is included and excluded from our definition of the situation; facilitate bibliographic work; and enable the development of further themes.

Evolution has its benefits. We should grow as a discipline and look for ways in which we can make the comparative study of civilizations of use to contemporary leaders. And if not now, when?

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