

THE HOLLOW MEN

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"We are the hollow men,
We are the stuffed men--
Leaning together:
Headpiece filled with straw."

So, T.S. Eliot pronounces the epitaph of our society--a world of hollow men. Today we lean together, each depending upon the other--to oblivion.

We face together the hope that was yesterday, the challenge that is tomorrow--and upon the future we seek to build anew a world of justice and responsibility.

We attempt to improve a world that has given us much.

For today, modern man differs from his ancestors in several important respects. In America, the advent of public education has guaranteed a foundation for greatness to any individual whose initiative and perseverance will pave his way to success.

Today, the span and scope of man's dreams are unlimited. Their crystalline forms offer a working, breathing, 24-hour a day testimonial to the society of free men that give them life. America today is living proof that man, when given a fair chance, can open new panoramas of hope. For you see, America is a country that allows a man to dream, and moreover, to see his dreams become reality. Such is the nature of modern opportunity. And so, quite logically, we ask ourselves, "How did this country, the leader of the free world, the mythical land of milk and honey, become a society of hollow men?"

The answer lies in a tragic misconception. For the magic of opportunity can work only if it is coupled with the more basic virtue of responsibility. It is this characteristic which is lacking in the world of the hollow men.

Almost 200 years ago, a group of farsighted men estimated a basic premise of human nature. They observed that no matter what technological breakthrough occurred or scientific advances were made, man could prevail by his wits. Moreover, they drafted a blueprint for this philosophy, in a constitution establishing a society based on individual rights with equal protection for its citizens under the law.

The government they endorsed was a product of the human mind so perfect it has never been equalled. It has established itself as a giant in the world, a leader of the community of nations.

But that society was formed upon one cardinal virtue--that man would, as the essence of his nature, practice justice and restraint, or more simply, possess personal responsibility. And so, today, man must accept the challenge of his ancestors

There are two general types of responsibility that can be exercised in our society. One is a personal dedication to the defense of civil, religious, and intellectual liberties that made this country great. The other is the type of "responsibility" assumed by the hollow man.

But responsibility is social as well as aesthetic. The family unit, the building block of American society, depends on responsibility. The hollow man's family is no exception. But in that home the environmental factors that determine the destiny of the child have been left to the man down the street, the friend next door, the minister, the teacher, or in most cases to chance. The child of modern man finds himself groping for meaning in the same world that confounds and perplexes his father. In a world that cries out for his tolerance, there is no one to teach it in the home; and so the child wonders.

The child who can find no meaning in his life becomes the youth who reacts to exactly the same stimulus. He sneers at God; he rebels at society; he lashes out with all the power he can muster at a world so seemingly full of injustice. He is the juvenile delinquent, the rioter, the rapist, the social outcast.

But more important--he is a product of the hollow man, of people who just didn't care enough. He now becomes a public problem for the society that created him.

This is the society that teaches its young to seek security and to strive only enough to win. It is the society that teaches the young man that society owes him a good time, a fair chance, and an adequate living as a matter of course. It is the

society that teaches its young that most standards of propriety, decency, and personal morality are products of a bygone era. When these preconceptions are challenged, the youth rebels.

Why not? He has grown up in a society pregnant with the confusion of a situation morality. It is the society that applauds the rise to power of the large corporation executive, but ignores the graft and corruption that are in many cases present in his development. It is the society that uses sex to sell everything from toothpaste to automobiles, finds its heroes in secret agents who have the morality of alley cats, but condemns murder, premarital pregnancy, and adultery. It is the society that by placid or implied acceptance of abhorrent values reduces us all to self-righteous hypocrites. Perhaps James Thurber best summarized this paradox of modern existence in his Fables for Our Times.

He describes the conversation of two ostriches concerning man's ability to fly. One young ostrich states that men can fly sitting down, while ostriches cannot fly at all. An older and much wiser ostrich counsels the youth, "Man is flying too fast for a world that is round and sooner or later he will catch up with himself. Then, in a great, rear-end collision, man will never know that what hit him from behind was man."

Perhaps in this age of modern enlightenment, men lack the wisdom of ostriches.

Today, my message to you is a simple one. There is a reality of the present and a hope for the future. Unless man can establish his society on something more than a foundation of sand--there will be no future. Unless society can function with men united as individuals there will be no society. Life demands responsibility. For remember, it was in Rome that women stood on the pillars of marble, and the men listened to them cry, "We are the greatest city, the greatest nation, nothing like us, ever was, nothing like us, ever was." Today rats run in the ruins that were Rome.

This my friends, is the age of the "common man." It is a prefabricated haven for John. Q. Average American whose bewilderment so easily lends itself to collectivization. Man finds himself surrounded by problems and paradoxes of a computer age he does not understand. In desperation, he seeks refuge in anonymity of society.

There he can be a part of the whole, above approach for problems he can blame on someone else. There his needs are supplied, and he is equal to his fellowman. There all men work for the good of each other. There, there is no greed, no jealousy, no hate, no envy.

Here is the answer: government without responsibility, life without responsibility, existence of excellence, the ultimate--Utopia.

Here, society bears all the burdens, wipes all the noses, and tucks adults as well as children in a bed of never ending peaceful sleep.

Here is the hope of the common man, the hollow man--the world of a dream. If we choose to love in it, we certainly will die in it; and so, Eliot concludes:

"This is the way the world ends,
This is the way the world ends,
This is the way the world ends:
Not with a bang--but with a whimper."