

INDIVIDUAL,
EDUCATIONAL,
AND SOCIAL
TRANSFORMATION

BAROMETERS
OF CHANGE

SEYMOUR B.
SARASON

Barometers of Change

.....

Individual, Educational, and
Social Transformation

Jossey-Bass Publishers
San Francisco



Alan Dershowitz's commencement address reprinted by permission of Alan M. Dershowitz, Felix Frankfurter Professor of Law, Harvard Law School.

Book review by Stephen Wright copyright © by the New York Times Company. Reprinted by permission.

Excerpts and letter to the editor from The National Psychologist reprinted by permission of The National Psychologist, 6100 Channingway Blvd., Suite 303, Columbus, OH 43232.

Copyright © 1996 by Jossey-Bass Inc., Publishers, 350 Sansome Street, San Francisco, California 94104. Copyright under International, Pan American, and Universal Copyright Conventions. All rights reserved. No part of this book may be reproduced in any form—except for brief quotation (not to exceed 1,000 words) in a review or professional work—without permission in writing from the publishers.

Substantial discounts on bulk quantities of Jossey-Bass books are available to corporations, professional associations, and other organizations. For details and discount information, contact the special sales department at Jossey-Bass Inc., Publishers (415) 433-1740; Fax (800) 605-2665.

For sales outside the United States, please contact your local Simon & Schuster International Office.



Manufactured in the United States of America on Lyons Falls Pathfinder Tradebook. This paper is acid-free and 100 percent totally chlorine-free.

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Sarason, Seymour Bernard, date.

Barometers of change : individual, educational, and social transformation / Seymour B. Sarason. — 1st ed.
p. cm.

Includes bibliographical references and index.

ISBN 0-7879-0198-9

1. Social change—United States. 2. Education—Social aspects—United States. 3. United States—Social conditions. I. Title.
HN57.S28 1996
303.4'0973—dc20

95-26191
CIP

Preface

.....

In 1980, historian Carl Schorske's *Fin-De-Siècle Vienna* (1980) was published. Why write about Vienna at the end of the nineteenth century? Schorske's area of expertise was modern European intellectual history. He had, he tells us, no special training or expertise as a historian of the Habsburg Empire.

In the late 1940s, Schorske started to outline a course in modern European intellectual history "designed to help students to understand the large, architectonic correlations between high culture and sociopolitical change" (pg. xviii). The course development went well until he ran into what Nietzsche and the Marxists called "decadence."

European high culture entered a whirl of infinite innovation, with each field proclaiming independence of the whole and each part in turn falling into additional parts. Into the ruthless centrifuge of change were drawn the very concepts by which cultural phenomena might be fixed in thought. Not only the producers of culture but also its analysts and critics fell victim to the fragmentation. The many categories devised to define or govern any one of the trends in post-Nietzschean culture—irrationalism, subjectivism, abstractionism, anxiety, technologism—neither possessed the surface virtue of lending

themselves to generalization nor allowed any convincing dialectical integration into the historical process as previously understood. Every search for a plausible twentieth-century equivalent to such sweeping but heuristically indispensable categories as “the Enlightenment” seemed doomed to founder on the heterogeneity of the cultural substance it was supposed to cover. Indeed, the very multiplicity of analytic categories by which modern movements defined themselves had become, to use Arnold Schoenberg’s term, “a death-dance of principles” [p. xix].

Schorske goes on to say, “What was the historian to do in the face of this confusion? It seemed imperative to respect the historical development of each constituent branch of modern culture (social thought, literature, architecture, etc.), rather than to hide the pluralized reality behind homogenizing definitions. I therefore turned for help to my colleagues in other disciplines. Their intellectual situation, however, only compounded the problem” (p. xix–xx). What Schorske found was frustrating in the extreme. When he spoke to his colleagues (at Berkeley and elsewhere) about the fields of greatest interest to him (social thought, literature, architecture, philosophy, and music and other arts) he found that scholarship in the 1950s had turned away from history as a basis for self-understanding, and parallel with that, had moved in directions that markedly weakened their “social relatedness.” In literature, the New Critics adopted an “atemporal, internalistic formal analytic” approach. In political science, the normative concerns of traditional political philosophy, with its pragmatic concerns for questions of public policy, “began to give way to ahistorical and politically neutralizing reign of the behaviorists.” In economics, mathematically oriented theorists “expanded their dominion at the expense of older, socially minded institutionalists and of public policy Keynesians.” In music, a “new cerebrality” had begun to erode musicology’s historical concerns. And in philosophy, the traditional questions, the

"old" enduring questions, were eschewed in favor of questions about the nature of language and logic, as if philosophy was to be an arm of scientific thinking. Philosophy broke ties "both to history and to the discipline's own past."

What intrigued Schorske was that in post World War II America a variety of ideas and trends that were so much a feature of end-of-the-century Vienna had suffused a number of disciplines in the American University. It was this observation that led Schorske to spend years studying that Vienna: capital of an empire that was coming apart at the seams, a turbulent decline in large part initiated in the 1848 war in which Austria was the loser; a pluralistic, conflict-ridden Vienna. Schorske felt justified in suggesting that the political and intellectual life in post World War II America reflected a "crisis of a liberal polity as a unifying context for the simultaneous transformation in the separate branches of culture. The fact that Freud and his contemporaries [not only psychoanalysts] aroused new interest in America in itself suggested Vienna as a unit of study" (p. xxv).

All of the above is stated very succinctly in Schorske's brief introductory chapter. Clearly, he saw that post World War II America was in a process of transformation.

Schorske's "problem" arose when he began to teach his course on modern European intellectual history. My "problem" arose in the 1960s when I tried to make unified sense out of the welter of seemingly discrete trends and happenings that made that decade a legend. By "make sense" I mean two things. First, I wondered, how did seemingly discrete trends, events, and happenings appear to be coalescing, and if they were, were they expressive of shared feelings and ideas, however differently verbalized? Second, could I profitably mine my own past adult life—beginning in the 1930s—to glean aspects of the sociohistorical context from which the sixties emerged? In books and articles I wrote after that decade, these two questions were implicitly in the background, sometimes explicitly in the foreground. I was always aware, however, that I was intimidated by the fear, not without basis, that much of what I observed

and thought was in the realm of personal opinion, a frail reed upon which to depend for general conclusions. And, yet, the more I thought, read, and pondered, the more convinced I became that what I wanted to say needed to and should have been said. It is not that what I had to say was new—it was not—but rather that it had not been said enough, certainly not enough to counter the ahistorical stance endemic in the university, although Schorske saw that stance emerging in the 1950s, and he was not, as a decade later I was not, untroubled by what he was observing and being told by his ahistorical colleagues.

My books *Work, Aging, and Social Change* (1977) and *The Making of an American Psychologist* (1988), and my more recent book of essays, *Psychoanalysis, General Custer, and the Verdicts of History* (1994), were efforts to begin to clarify my “problem.” The present book of essays is still another effort at presentation and clarification. If I am agonizingly aware that I have no corner on knowledge, truth, and wisdom, I am not at all defensive about the contents of these essays. They are honest expressions of my thinking, as they may also be a symptom of chutzpah because nothing in my formal education and training, or in the professional roles I have been in, has “credentialed” me to write about social change. This book will be published after I have become seventy seven years of age. Time is not on my side, which is to say that whatever credentials some would say I should have in order to tackle the nature of post World War II social change, I have neither the time or inclination to obtain. That in large part explains why I wrote these essays as individual pieces, each dealing with an aspect of that change. They share several common themes which, I trust, will be evident, but each essay can stand by itself.

The essays in this book were not informed by any desire to construct or test any formal theory. I am not a theoretician, by talent or by interest. I am an observer of the social scene, trying to make sense of why and how America changed in my lifetime, and by “make sense” I mean doing it in a way that will allow readers to determine whether it makes sense to them too in light of what they

have experienced and concluded; whether it helps them see relationships that they may not have thought about and that deserve reflection; whether because of age they fell victim to ignoring that their present contains the lineal psychological descendants of a not-distant past that they themselves cannot understand without knowing how that past is in the present.

No reader will deny that his or her past is relevant to his or her present "psychology." That is precisely the principle I would hope that readers would become aware of and apply when they seek to explain today's social scene, rather than, as too many readers will have done, explaining it only in light of the compelling present and the very near past. If the unexamined life is not worth living, then leaving your society unexamined, its past ethos and vicissitudes relegated to the museum of history to which you are not inclined to go, is doing no favor to the worth of your society. Vienna at the end of the nineteenth century is not America at the end of the twentieth century. But I agree completely with Schorske that the America of today, like an earlier Vienna, has been undergoing a social transformation in a major way. One can hope that what happened in Vienna and the rest of Europe after the turn of the century will not happen here. As I am at pains to say in these essays, the present is pregnant with many futures, not one. How the post World War II social change gets played out I make no predictions about. I could, at the point of a gun, envision a gloomy future or a more hopeful one. Of one thing I am sure: that future will in part depend on whether increasing numbers of people depart from the intellectually simple, ahistorical stance. That is why in several of these essays I repeat Mencken's caveat that for every important problem there is a simple answer that is wrong.

Acknowledgments

In the course of thinking about and writing the essays in this book, Michael Klaber was helpful both as a dear friend and as a very astute and idea-producing sounding board. Needless to say, it will be apparent

to the scholarly reader that much of what I have to say has been said or adumbrated in the past by others too numerous to mention. I trust that no reader will accuse me of the Henry Ford stance that history is bunk. Again needless to say, I am indebted to Lisa Pagliaro, who in small and large ways makes it impossible for me "just" to say thanks for her secretarial assistance. Even though "secretarial assistance" is factual, using the term is another instance of the factual obscuring the truth. Finally, it is with gratitude that I acknowledge Lesley Iura for her editorial suggestions.

New Haven, Conn.
January 1996

Seymour B. Sarason

The Author

.....

Seymour B. Sarason is professor of psychology emeritus in the Department of Psychology and at the Institute for Social and Policy Studies at Yale University. He founded, in 1962, and directed, until 1970, the Yale Psycho-Educational Clinic, one of the first research and training sites in community psychology. He received his Ph.D. degree (1942) from Clark University and holds honorary doctorates from Syracuse University, Queens College, Rhode Island College, and Lewis and Clark College. He has received an award for distinguished contributions to the public interest and several awards from the divisions of clinical and community psychology of the American Psychological Association, as well as two awards from the American Association on Mental Deficiency.

Sarason is the author of numerous books and articles. His more recent books include *The Making of an American Psychologist: An Autobiography* (1988); *The Predictable Failure of Educational Reform: Can We Change Course Before It's Too Late?* (1990); *The Challenge of Art to Psychology* (1990); *You Are Thinking of Teaching? Opportunities, Problems, Realities* (1993); *The Case for Change: Rethinking the Preparation of Educators* (1993); *Letters to a Serious Education President* (1993); *Psychoanalysis, General Custer, and the Verdicts of History and Other Essays on Psychology in the Social Scene* (1994); and *Parental Involvement and the Political Principle: Why the Existing Governance Structure of Schools Should Be Abolished* (1995). He has made

contributions in such fields as mental retardation, culture and personality, projective techniques, teacher training, the school culture, and anxiety in children.

Contents

.....

<i>Preface</i>	ix
<i>The Author</i>	xv
1. Introduction: The Past in the Present	1
2. The Coalescing of Discrete Trends	17
3. The Individual and the Theme of Liberation	37
4. The University as a Barometer of Social Change	55
5. Personal Barometers	73
6. The Changing Ecology of Child Rearing	93
7. The Abortion Issue	117
8. Recollected Sexual Memories	145
9. Working and Loving	171
10. Artistic Expression	221
11. Power Relationships in Our Schools	239
12. Cities and Schools	263
<i>References</i>	279
<i>Index</i>	283

Introduction

The Past in the Present

In 1988 I published my autobiography *The Making of an American Psychologist*. Although I intended it as autobiography, I knew at the outset that the last thing the reading public needed was a clinical account of the complexities of my mind, personality, sources of guilt and shame, and the like. Those complexities are the same as those of everyone else, an assumption I have never had reason to question. What I wanted to do was show how a particular psychologist who grew up in a distinctive time and era in a distinctive society came to think and act as he did. My interest was in time, place, era—that is, the externals, so to speak, that impacted on me and guaranteed that I would become an *American* and an *American* psychologist, not a British, French, or Japanese psychologist. That is not to say that an American psychologist has no intellectual-conceptual-substantive kinship to a “foreign” psychologist, but rather that being an American psychologist is a difference that makes a difference. All of us know that principle, without resort to comparison among people in different countries. If we have lived our lives in Manhattan, we have no doubt that we see ourselves and the world differently than we would if we had spent our lives in another city. We are increasingly told that if you work within the confines of the beltway, called Washington, D.C., you acquire an outlook different from the one you would acquire in Albany, Trenton, or Sacramento. When you send your child to a private rather than a

public school, it is because you believe or hope that he or she will acquire an outlook that is different in important ways from the outlook he or she would acquire in the public school.

In the course of growing up, no one had to tell me that America was a large, complex country comprised of regions and groups each of which had distinctive characteristics that "somehow or other" were assimilated by those in the regions or groups. I put quotes around "somehow or other" because that is what fascinated me about myself and about others elsewhere. In cultural-crazy-quilt America, how did I come to think as I do or did? Why and in what ways have I changed? At the core of one's identity is a kernel of psychological constancy, that is, you feel you have always been the kind of person you are, that basically and privately you have always been "this way." And yet, you know that a lot about you has changed because of where you have been and moved from, the institutions of which you have been a part, the people you have known and been influenced by, and the events (local, national, and international) that have caused you to see yourself and the world differently than before. That is why the word "making" is in the title of that earlier book. My emphasis was on the aspects of American society that entered into the manufacture of me, and I gave what I hoped was enough very personal material to allow the reader to know that I knew the manufacturing process was of and about a particular human being. As I indicated to the reader of that book, I truly believe that if you know I am an American male, a New Yorker to boot, possessing a physical handicap, and Jewish, you know or can intuit a good deal about me, some of it invalid but much of it on target. In any event, given my purpose I did not feel it was necessary to spill my psychological guts. I did precisely that when I was psychoanalyzed, soon after which I realized that nothing in the analysis illuminated how being brought up in America at a certain time and era was no less impactful than the personalities of my parents, siblings, and an extended family with "only in America" characteristics. To my analyst (a superb one), my psyche—

better yet, my intrapsychic goings on—was center stage. How my psyche was impacted on by being born into, reared, and educated in America was for all explanatory purposes not on that stage.

In the course of writing that book I realized that far more important, to me at least, than how I became the psychologist I did were the ways in which America had changed in my lifetime—more important and more interesting, certainly more complex to understand. As one becomes truly, demographically old it is understandable, perhaps inevitable, to start “summing up,” constructing a narrative that explains why you became what you are: the roads taken or not, the impact of diverse relationships, the mistakes you think you made, the gratification from reaching your mark or sadness that you did not, the role of luck or serendipity, and a lot more in the nature of “those are the cards I was dealt, that is the way I played them; I won some deals and I lost some deals.” In my case, for the last decade or so, trying to sum up the significances of and relationships among the social changes I witnessed has been a major preoccupation. I was born at the end of World War I; I have vague memories of the twenties (the “jazz age,” café, night club society); I remember the fantastic excitement when Lindbergh flew over the ocean, then the stock market crash, the Great Depression, World War II, the cold war, the Korean War, the Vietnam War, racial issues, the women’s liberation movement, assassinations—need I say more? Those were not items in books. However you define real, they were real for me. But they were largely discrete events; I saw and sought no pattern. The conclusion that perhaps the world was going to hell—or perhaps flirting with that possibility—was a tempting one, but only if I was semisecure that underlying those events was a pattern in line with that conclusion.

I have no such security today. I am gun-shy of grand theories that purport to explain social change, although most of them have kernels of compelling truths, such as Marx, Spengler, and Toynbee. Reading these and other theorists I am struck by three of their characteristics. First, they seek to predict the long-term future. Second,

the forces they regard as powering social change are unstoppable, permitting them to say what will inevitably be apparent in the distant future. Third, they do not end up with but rather begin with values and assumptions about what the good society should be.

The first characteristic is foolhardy. The second I regard as largely wrong because it rests on the assumption that contingency is no factor in societal affairs. These theorists never would, I assume, make that assumption about individual lives, but they do make it about a whole society—and some of them do not restrict themselves to one society but take on the whole world. It is one thing to say that the forces that power social change are unstoppable; it is quite another thing to say that how they get played out is predictable. So, for example, from our earliest national days it was made clear that America would someday have its comeuppance for legitimating slavery. How and if that bill would be paid was unpredictable; the only thing that could be said was that it would be high. Would it have been as high as it is if Lincoln had lived? Or would it have made no difference in how things got played out? One could retort by saying that the question is on all fours with the question, "What if Cleopatra had a long nose?" But if neither question is answerable, it does not invalidate the role of contingency in the direction, pace, and consequences of social change.

The third characteristic may be the most problematic of all. When you start with values, explicit or implicit, you tend to be drawn to data or examples that confirm your values and you tend to ignore or misweigh those factors that would disconfirm those values (or assumptions) or that would require you to temper your certainty about how things *will* be played out. That is a problem for every social theorist. Misreading or misweighing the strength with which different groups hold or oppose a particular value is why long-term predictions are so frequently grossly wrong. For example, I am not aware that anyone ever predicted that the end of apartheid in South Africa would come about peacefully and legally. On the contrary, it was expected to come about by a civil war or some version

of a bloodbath. It has not happened that way, and the explanation is and will turn out to be complex, to indulge understatement. That the personality, status, and history of Nelson Mandela have to be part of that explanation is obvious, and the kind of contingency of which historians are quite aware. But it is equally obvious that what Mandela stands for, his values, were not alien to those of his racial constituencies or to a significant fraction of whites, among whom there undoubtedly were some, to say the least, who experienced a conflict or ambivalence about their values. And that is the point: the forecasters misread or misweighed the strength and prevalence of those values as they envisioned what would happen when push came to shove. The relation of values to action depends on many factors not the least of which is whether those values are, if only on the level of rhetoric, in the people's phenomenology. It is when the conflict of values among the players is sharp, absolute, and irreconcilable that bloodbaths and civil wars occur—witness the American Civil War, the history of Northern Ireland, and the Arab-Israeli conflicts. If the forecasters in and out of South Africa were wrong about how the seemingly irreconcilable values would get played out, it was in part (and only in part) because they underestimated the degree to which democratic values were held in the different segments of the population. That, I hasten to add, does not mean that it will continue to be played out as it so far has been. Precisely because those values are not Platonic essences uncomplicated by ambivalence due to other conflicting values, the playing out of the social drama is not something about which I, for one, am unequivocally sanguine. As a friend of mine said, "I do not believe in God but I sure as hell hope and pray that He takes good care of Mandela's health at the same time that He strikes dead any would-be assassin." Hopes expose our values, and in the case of South Africa it appears that many of its citizens had and have hopes the strength and prevalence of which were underestimated. I consider hopes one of the important barometers of the course of social change.