

Address by the Danish Ambassador at Suffolk University, Boston, Massachusetts

March 3, 1964

I am indeed honored to be here at Suffolk University and to have been invited to be one of the speakers at the Edward L. Bernays Foundation's lecture series on Europe's contribution to American Civilization.

I am honored, but somehow reluctant, because of the topic and because so little research has been done on this subject as far as Denmark's contribution is concerned.

In comparing the size and achievements of this country with those of most other countries one cannot help asking what contributions a small country like Denmark with a population of only  $4\frac{1}{2}$  million - less than half of the number of inhabitants of greater New York - and an area of only about 17.000 sq. miles, can possibly have made towards the development of American civilization. Is it not the other way round? It is, however, well to remember that Denmark is one of the oldest countries in the world with a history of unbroken independence going back to the dim times before written records were made, and that at certain times we have played a role in world history, thereby at least indirectly influencing also the history of this country.

How far back does one dare to go?

In the suggested outline that I received from Mr. Daniel

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Bloomfield some time ago it was furthermore stated, and I quote:

"The United States is a nation made up of the descendants of immigrants from every part of the world. From the first planting of Jamestown in 1607 to the arrival of refugees after 1945, it drew strength from the successive movements of population westward across the Atlantic. Among the immigrants were both men and women of distinction and the humbler folk whose labor helped develop the American economy".

When did that kind of Danish influence on America start?

Surely, in thinking about the English contribution to the American civilization, it is tempting to go way back to the Viking Period, when Denmark became a Baltic and an Atlantic Power, with all the political, economic and cultural consequences which that entailed.

While the Norwegians settled on the Atlantic islands and in parts of Scotland and Ireland, and the Swedes made their way along the great Russian rivers to the Black Sea, Danish Vikings overran the Frisian coast, and about 800 A.D. swung across the North Sea to England. From the middle of the century one great campaign followed another in an almost unbroken assault, and in 886 the King of Wessex was forced to cede the land north of a line from London to Chester (the Danelaw), where the Danes settled permanently. It was not until about 900 that Alfred the Great succeeded in checking this influx, and the Danish raids were for a time directed against Normandy. The last great assault on England

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took place in the years prior to 1016, when the Danish king, Knud the Great completed his conquest of the entire country and of southern Norway, holding both in a short-lived empire.

The impact of the Danes on England can easily be traced to our time, through similarities in language, and through the names of towns and places where the Danes had settled, and there can hardly be any doubt that the Danes at least indirectly have had influence on this country through the English settlers.

The years 1619 and 1620 mark the beginning of the Danish-American history through the disastrous voyage of Jens Munk to the Hudson Bay region where - in the name of his King, Christian the Fourth - he named the land at and beyond his winter harbor "Nova Dania".

By way of a comment on American church history, let me mention that the Christmas service held by the ships' pastor in the frozen North was the first Lutheran Christmas service to be held on this side of the Atlantic Ocean.

62 men lost their lives in this expedition; only Jens Munk and two of his men managed to return to Denmark with one of the two ships with which they had left Copenhagen the year before, followed by the hope and good wishes of all their fellow-countrymen.

No Danish colonization has since taken place in the western hemisphere with the exception of the Virgin Islands, which for more than two hundred years belonged to Denmark. Since 1917 they have been American possessions.

Before leaving this part of my speech, let me mention that around 1730 the Danish explorer Vitus Bering in the service of Czar Peter the Great discovered that Asia and America are not contiguous but separated by the sound now known as the Bering Strait.

Speaking of direct Danish contribution to American civilization, the 350,000 people who have emigrated from Denmark to America must be given prominent consideration. They brought with them their own culture, beliefs and habits; together with immigrants of other nationalities they left a lasting imprint upon the culture of America, and they had their share in shaping this great nation.

The building of America is an achievement without parallel. The handful of men who settled at Jamestown in Virginia in 1607 and those who came to Plymouth in 1620 little realized that within 300 years this new country was to become a world power.

When Henry Hudson came to Manhattan Island in 1609 and understood that his mission to find a passage to the East had failed, he could not have imagined that a metropolis of eight million people was to spread out from Manhattan in less than 350 years.

From the very beginning America was a refuge and a land of promise. There was wealth enough for all in the New World, and the greatest emigration of all times took its beginning when the colonies were founded.

The Danish settlers were among the very first in this country. Many of them came empty-handed as far as material wealth is concerned, but like other emigrants they carried with them energies

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and capacities vital for the making of a nation. The Danes became an important part of the Dutch settlement in Manhattan in the period from 1624 to 1664, the most famous of them being Jonas Bronck, who bought a tract of land north of Harlem River. The land was called Broncks land, and it is now known as the Bronx, one of the boroughs of New York City.

Jonas Bronck, by the way, brought with him from Denmark a large collection of books believed to be the first library coming from Europe to the New World.

One of the most colorful of the Danish immigrants in California was Peter Lassen. His name is well known all over the United States and especially in California, where "Lassen Volcanic National Park" with "Lassen Peak" is named in his honor.

He came to America in 1829, crossed the plains where now Oregon city is situated, and in 1840 moved on to San Francisco. He piloted immigrants over the Cascade mountains on their way to the gold fields in California. Truly a Danish pioneer who has written his name in America's history.

The Gold Rush, around the middle of the last century, brought several Danes to the West Coast. As far as I know, none of them found the millions they all were looking for. Well, perhaps there was one exception, Mads Christian Holm, whose life is like a fairy-tale.

He was born in 1827 in Nykøbing Mors, where he grew up in very poor circumstances. He learnt the trade of a shipbuilder and worked for a while at the shipyard at Elsinore. One day, he left the town

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onboard an American ship and came here to Boston, from where he proceeded to San Francisco. He arrived there in 1848. He did not dig for gold, but made quite a lot of money selling groceries and other essential commodities at places, where hundreds were looking for the coveted metal. I do not know to which extent he contributed to American civilization, except through his pioneer-spirit and the fact that with the money he earned from selling groceries he founded the first shipyard in Oakland, California. Apparently, he made a lot of money in the course of a few years. In 1854 he returned to Denmark, where he built a shipyard at Aabenraa, and in 1881 he founded the world-famous shipyard "Helsingør Jernskibs- og Maskinbyggeri" at Elsinore.

It is tempting to talk at greater length about the individuals who made a name for themselves and for Denmark in America in the early days of the history of this country, but I shall refrain from doing so.

However, I cannot be with a group such as this without remembering with humility and pride the contribution of Danish immigrants to the building of one of the greatest and most powerful nations in the world.

Let us not forget the thousands and thousands of pioneers from Denmark, who crossed the country on foot, often pushing a handcart with their few belongings, and having to cut down the trees to get material for the primitive log cabins that were to be their homes. Others went to the prairie states, where no wood could be found; they

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had to make their first home in a hole in a hillside or in a hut made from prairie-sod.

Out of the wilderness, out of the log cabins and out of the sod-huts came the first small Danish-American settlements, some of which grew into American towns.

Out of this primitive beginning came also an injection into American cultural and spiritual life.

I have been told that the first Danish-American church in Nebraska was built from prairie-sod, and yet, out of this beginning came other Danish-American churches, about 500 of them, and more than 150 of them are still in use. We should perhaps also remember that the Danish Folk High School, a unique school for adult education, founded by the Danish poet, historian and clergyman, Bishop Grundtvig (of whom I shall speak later) was transplanted to American soil and played an important role in the Danish-American farm districts. Many Americans of Danish descent, who today have leading positions in the American society, can trace their spiritual and cultural heritage back to these schools no longer in existence.

Also schools of higher learning were built by Danish immigrants, such as Grand View College in Des Moines, Iowa, and Dana College in Blair, Nebraska. Dana is now 78 years old - a long period in the Danish-American history. Today they are American schools, but their Danish heritage is apparent in many ways, and thousands of Americans receive their academic training from these schools.

I could mention other institutions, the many societies with various functions such as the Danish Brother- and Sisterhood of

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America, which grew into the largest Danish organization outside Denmark. And the many lodges under the Danish society "Dania" in California and Nevada should not be forgotten, nor the oldest existing Danish organization in America "Dania" in Chicago, more than 100 years old. All of these and hundreds of other Danish-American organizations have certainly contributed to the building of America.

When looking at Danish-American history, it is stunning to note that approximately 200 newspapers and periodicals have been printed in the Danish language in this country since 1847, when the first Danish-American newspaper was published in New York City. Some of these publications were only short-lived, and some of them appeared only with a few issues. Others, which had a long life, are strongholds in the Danish language press in America, such as "Den danske Pioneer" now in its 92nd year, published in Chicago, and "Bien" in its 82nd year, published in San Francisco.

The Danish-American Press may seem rather insignificant today, but through the more than one hundred years of its existence, it had its share in helping the Danish immigrant to fill his place in his new country.

It would be tempting to touch on the subject of Danish-American literature, but that would require a lecture in itself.

Let me just say that only a few Danish-American writers have achieved eminence outside their own language group. One of them, whose books published in the latter part of the last century and at the beginning of this century made him the best known Danish-American, is Jacob Riis.

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He opened the eyes of the American people to the miseries and indignities suffered by large numbers of the inhabitants of New York. His series of articles illustrated by photos attracted much attention; these articles and a series of lectures enabled Riis to pave the way for radical slum reforms. The police governor of the city of New York, the later President Theodore Roosevelt, extended active support to his plans and even accompanied him on his wanderings among the outcasts of the city. Later Roosevelt gave Riis the designation "The most useful citizen of New York". Besides his journalistic work he published a number of books, especially on social conditions, and a biography of his friend Roosevelt. This country, where he made such deserving efforts, has honored his memory by naming a settlement house in New York and a park in Chicago after him.

Speaking about Jacob Riis, let me mention briefly that in an article which he wrote in a magazine in Delaware, at the beginning of this century, he called attention to the work done in Denmark for the treatment of tuberculosis. The money to build sanatoriums came in through the sale of Christmas seals, which originated in Denmark. The idea was immediately adopted in this country, and has since been a blessing to thousands of Americans inflicted with the disease.

Perhaps I should also mention the name of Professor Niels Ebbesen Hansen, who in 1897 was appointed Agricultural Explorer by the Department of Agriculture in Washington. He made several trips to Russia,

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China and other countries to find plants and trees that would be sufficiently resistant to grow on the American Prairie. He found a special kind of alfalfa, known in this country as "Hansen Cossack Alfalfa". This plant could resist even the driest summer, and it turned large districts of useless land into invaluable sources of wealth.

Just one more name of a Danish American who in the industrial field became of the greatest importance to America. It is the name of William S. Knudsen, who as President of General Motors, played such a prominent role in the enormous growth of the automobile industry, and as Lieutenant-General of the United States Army in the last world war undertook the job of Director General of the Office of Production Management, charged with the tremendous responsibility of organizing the industrial program so important to the war efforts.

I should not forget to mention the homes for the aged built by Danish-Americans. These homes are in themselves proof of the fact that the Danes who emigrated to America took with them from Denmark the understanding of social problems and the love for the old people whose workingdays are over.

Denmark was the first country in the world to introduce a free old-age pension scheme, and briefly it can be said that Denmark has been a pioneer country in the field of social legislation, in which official America, as well as many individuals in this country, have been keenly interested.

My talk would not be complete, if I neglected to say a few

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words about the influence of contemporary Danish design in America. We have managed at least partially, to preserve the sound traditions of our handicrafts and to transfer to a more industrialized production those traditions as regards treatment of material, good constructive design and careful attention to details.

This is most clearly revealed in the manufacture of furniture, which has become extremely popular in America, but it also applies to Danish silver, porcelain, glass, textiles, rugs etc., which are found in thousands and thousands of American homes.

Let me now turn to some of the Danish ideas and thoughts that reached America without the assistance of the Danish immigrants. The time at my disposal, however, only permits me to mention a few examples.

The saying goes that the Danish writer of fairytales, Hans Christian Andersen, has always been in the United States, and in a sense that is correct, as many of his fairy tales were published in America immediately after their publication in Denmark. Indeed some of them even made their first appearance in America, before they were published in Denmark.

The book "The Andersen Scudder Letters" by the late Jean Hersholt of Movie and Radio-fame, reveals that the editor of "The Riverside Monthly Magazine for Young People", Horace Elisha Scudder, who lived in Cambridge outside Boston, translated and published eleven of Hans Christian Andersen's fairy tales that were not published before.

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No single person has stronger than this Danish writer strengthened the cultural bonds between our two nations. If I were to draw a parallel with a Danish writer from our time, perhaps I could mention Isak Dinesen, alias Karen Blixen-Finecke, who in 1934 captured the attention of the literary world with her: "Seven Gothic Tales". It has been said that this writer of tales does not belong to any parochial list of Danish authors. She belongs to English literature as much as to Danish, for she herself has written most of her works in English as well as in Danish. We are proud indeed to share her with the world.

But let me again go back in time.

Curiously enough, Denmark had at the same time two outstanding religious figures who thought existentially. One of them was Søren Kierkegaard, the father of all existentialist thinkers, the other was the cleric and poet, Bishop N.F.S. Grundtvig, who came to be known in this country through the Danish Folk High School, of which he was the founder.

As I mentioned before, the Danish emigrant transplanted his educational ideas to American soil. Even today many American educators are interested in the educational philosophy of Grundtvig, and many have studied at the Danish Folk High Schools in Denmark.

Grundtvig and Kierkegaard differed immensely in almost everything, and indeed are the two poles of Danish culture in the nineteenth century. Kierkegaard was the supreme individualist, bent at all times on isolating the individual through his responsibility. Grundtvig on the other hand emphasized fellowship, and so became a

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major force in Danish culture, the great inspirer both of the folk high schools and of the agricultural cooperative movement. But in one respect they agreed: Both were opponents of systematic philosophy and speculation. Both opposed the idea that all contrasts of existence could be incorporated in a higher philosophic synthesis, eliminating the tensions of life, and thereby depriving of its meaning the Christian view of existence as a struggle between good and evil.

The two men, each in his own way, have exercised very great influence. Internationally, however, Kierkegaard has the advantage, because Grundtvig expressed his ideas primarily in poetry, a poetry which, in its idiom and its obscure symbolism, practically is untranslatable, whereas Kierkegaard's crystal clear dialectics easily can be rendered in other languages - although at some loss - because, at the same time, he was a great stylist, with a rare sense of rhythm. Still, enough will remain, and his meaning can never be in doubt: using the subtlest weapons of logic and philosophy, he achieved the feat of demonstrating the impotence of logic and philosophy in face of the supreme problems of existence.

I need not point out to this audience the influence of his thinking in this country.

Within the scientific field, I shall touch upon just a few of our foremost citizens, whose contribution to science has been of worldwide interest.

Let me briefly mention the Danish astronomer, Tyge Brahe, the founder of modern astronomy, whose discoveries and work in the

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17th century make his name comparable with those of Copernicus, Kepler and Galilei. Another name is that of Ole Rømer, the natural scientist, who in the latter part of the same century among other things discovered that light is moving or, as he expressed it, "The hesitation of light".

Let me also mention H.C. Ørsted, who in 1829 discovered that the electrical current influences the magnetic needle causing it to turn according to definite rules. His discovery of electromagnetism led to a very rapid development in this all-important scientific field.

Certainly, the work of these Danish scientists, indirectly as well as directly, contributed to American civilization.

This is true also of the Danish linguist Rasmus Kristian Rask, whose works in the early part of the 19th century made him the founder of modern comparative philology.

It is true also of Valdemar Poulsen, the Danish engineer, who at the turn of this century constructed a combination of the telephone and phonograph - the "Telegraphone". He worked on that invention together with the Danish engineer P.O. Pedersen, and their constructions, of fundamental importance to the development of wireless telegraphy and telephony, have since been adopted in most countries of the world.

One of his assistants, Peter L. Jensen, was sent to California in 1909 to assist in the installation of one of the first wireless stations to be established after Valdemar Poulsen's patent. Jensen stayed in America and became the co-inventor of the loudspeaker and a pioneer in the development of sound reproduction. He and his partner,

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Edwin Pridham, developed their dynamic loudspeaker in 1914. They called it Magnavox, and later formed the Magnavox Company.

I promised not to mention too many names, and I shall be as good as my word. One more name within the field of science must however be mentioned, and that is the name of Niels Bohr.

He earned his doctorate in physics at the University of Copenhagen in 1911. He was then 26 years of age. Five years later he was appointed to the chair of theoretical physics at that University. In 1922 he received the Nobel Prize for his pioneer work in solving the riddles of the atom. On his initiative the Institute for Theoretical Physics was founded in Copenhagen by the University there to facilitate close cooperation between theoretical and experimental researchers in atomic physics. With the assistance of grants from the Danish government and from philanthropic foundations, it was made possible for scientists of many countries to visit the Institute for periods of work and study. Also a great number of outstanding American scientists and students have studied there.

In October 1943 Professor Niels Bohr was forced to flee from occupied Denmark. He came to USA in December of that year to take part in the war-time atomic energy development. He was one of the leading figures among the group of physicists who succeeded in constructing the atomic bomb.

In his public pronouncements - such as his open letter to the United Nations - and through his world contacts he exerted great moral force in supporting the utilization of atomic energy for

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peaceful purposes. For this he was given the first Atoms for Peace Award, in 1957.

My time is running out.

I shall confine myself to only one more example of Denmark's contribution to American Civilization, and this is in the field of the motion picture industry.

This may come as a surprise to many of you. But it is a fact, that in the early days of this century Denmark was leading in this field, and hundreds of films produced in Denmark were exported to and shown in this country. The oldest existing film-making company in the world is Nordisk Film Company, located in Copenhagen on the same premises where it started in 1906. Remember that Hollywood did not start its production till 1911.

The first World War, when Denmark was more or less isolated from the world, dealt a heavy blow to Danish film, which now, because of the war, was hardly seen outside Scandinavia and Germany. About the same time Hollywood took a leading position in the film production unchallenged to this day.

Some of the Danish pictures in the new era of film-history have been received with great interest also in the United States. Foremost among them are, I believe, the films made by Carl Dreyer, who reached prominence towards the end of the silent film era, but today stands stronger than ever and is known the world over, admired, denounced and discussed. One of his in America best known films is "Day of Wrath" and the last of his films to be shown here is "The Word".

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During a stay in this country, from 1949 to 1950, he wrote the manuscript to a film about Christ. He wanted to make the film in Israel, but he has not as yet found anyone to produce it.

This talk has been like driving in a one way street.

Yet I know that some of the things I have touched upon were made possible only because of the close relationship between our two countries.

The relationship has manifested itself in many different ways. One of the first contacts between our two countries was when in 1777, from the old stone fort in Frederikssted, St. Croix, which then belonged to Denmark, the first foreign guns were fired in salute to the new flag of the United States.

Diplomatic relations between Denmark and America have existed for more than 160 years, and we have never been at war with each other. Ours has been a friendly relationship; there have been differences of opinion, yes, even difficulties, but we have always managed in a democratic way to settle our problems peacefully.

We believe in the same ideals as you do. We are like you charter members of the United Nations and of NATO, and we have joined you in many treaties of importance to our two countries. I do not know to which extent we have contributed to American civilization through this, but I do know that both of our countries have benefited from this relationship.

Another aspect of our relationship is the hundreds of young people we send to the United States every year as students or trainees,

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a great number of whom come here under the various programs for exchange of persons that your country has instituted. We also receive many young Americans in our country, and we attach the greatest importance to this exchange.

Exchanges, of course, are taking place on many levels within the arts and sciences, in which connection I should also mention the tours of both Danish and American performing artists, the symphony orchestras, the ballets etc.

Finally, let me mention the American Independence Day Celebrations held every Fourth of July in the ancient heather-clad hills in the Rebild National Park in Denmark. Here, every year since 1912, Americans and Danes assemble at times as many as 40,000. The Danish King and Queen are often present along with the American Ambassador and Danish and American high officials.

The thousands of Americans, who every year participate in this celebration are joining hands with the Danes in testimony to the dedication of our two nations to the same democracy. So it is and so let it be forever.