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## Report From Britain, 14 September 1949

James W. (James Wesley) Silver (1907-1988)

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REPORT FROM BRITAIN

James W. Silver  
(Chairman, History Department, University of Mississippi)

S. S. Washington  
Off Cobh, Ireland, Sept. 14, 1949

When Peter (accent definitely on the second syllable) Clifton was five years old his mother brought him to America. That was in 1941 and he still remembers seeing the next ship to his in the convoy being sent to the bottom by a German sub. At first he found it difficult "to decipher" what American children were saying, but four years' residence sold him on the United States. He is now returning to his London home from a further ten weeks' stay with relatives in New Jersey and Canada.

Peter is impressed most with American cars and roads. But he thinks the British could go in for mass production if they had the money. They are as smart as Americans, he tells me, and "want to make a good job of everything." He says that British trains are as good and subways "most superior" to those in the United States. To him American radio is a lot of fun but he just laughs at the commercials, most of which "are a good joke if you can appreciate it." He is inclined to like the Germans "now that their leaders have been put away," and he dislikes Russians - but "mind you, they helped us during the war." He is unwilling to "deliver judgment" on the cleverness of the Russians.

Peter's father is a chemist, did radar work during the war; his mother worked in the Supply Ministry. With the 1930 slump, Mr. Clifton "took a dim view" of the Conservatives and thereafter voted Labor, but Mrs. Clifton "changes every year." Peter himself is "skeptical" of the Labor government, though he admits that Mr. Bevin "looks like John Bull." (He thoughtfully explained to me that John is the counterpart of Uncle Sam.) He doesn't think that the Conservatives would have kept their promise to nationalize the mines and he is sure that Britain will not turn to Communism: "We're not that bad off." To Peter, Churchill is a "grand old man," but needs to be replaced with someone "as energetic."

Peter hasn't visited the doctor since nationalized medicine has come in (except to get an inoculation, which cost 60 cents) but his mother has often been to the old family

physician and his father to the dentist. They find the service "just as good as before." But Peter thinks that socialization has gone far enough for the present.

While the young Mr. Clifton is still astonished at the prodigal eating of Americans, he says he hasn't suffered too much in Britain. He has had plenty of vegetables and fish but not enough meat, eggs, milk, cookies, and sugar. When candy rationing went off this summer, he admits that the people became "candy hogs," but excuses this on the ground that they had been without it for nine years. Relatives in the United States send his family CARE packages about three times a year. Most CARE parcels go to specific addressees, he thinks. His family gets bananas once a month "under the counter," which he carefully explains is not black market procedure - the grocers simply have favorite "registered customers."

I asked Peter what he thought the American attitude should be toward Britain. "We're in a hole, don't you know," he said, "and we need your sympathy." He is inclined to believe that Britain has in the past given the people in the United States "something the Americans ought to give back."

In education, he says, "the Americans are nothing to us. If I were in America, I would be with the 15 year olds. School in the United States is conducted more in an attitude of luxury, even with movies." And if this sensitive 13 year old boy with the friendly smile and gracious manner is representative of the coming generation, it would be well if we hesitated before selling Britain short.

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