

**Niebuhr, *The Irony of American History*, Chapter 5**  
**Wesley Advocates 13 November 2016**

“The Triumph of Experience over Dogma”

Do we agree with RN that we have succeeded in establishing justice and ensuring domestic tranquility?

Why does RN think it unfortunate that we are, amongst our allies, “the most consistently bourgeois” in attitudes? How are we consistently bourgeois? How bad is that?

How has the U.S. achieved or failed to achieve the engagement of citizens’ self-interest? Has specialization of labor made us more productive, richer, more satisfied citizens?

Note RN’s comment, page 93, that typically the bourgeois man sees power only as political power. Do we agree? Why or why not? Evidence?

How do we account for the human desire for power and glory? What does RN mean when he says: “All the conflicts in human society involving passions and ambitions, hatreds and loves, envies and ideals, not recorded in the marketplace, are beyond the comprehension of the typical bourgeois ethos” (p. 94).

How did industrialization aggravate the lot of the poor? What has happened to them in the time of deindustrialization? Why?

See p. 96: note the contrasts between Jefferson’s and Madison’s documents, between Jefferson’s and Adams’s visions. Discuss.

Given events over this past several months and Tuesday’s election, can we say with Marx, “The most common and durable source of faction has been the various and unequal distribution of property”?

What have we gained and what have we lost as America has developed into a welfare state? How have our expectations of others and for others changed?

Have we equilibrated power? If so, how did we do that? If not, how did we not do it? Is it a good thing?

Do Europeans continue to indulge us as we talk of liberty and freedom—indulge as if we remain naïve?

Was the right of collective bargaining listed in the Declaration of Constitution?

In the U.S., are the privileged classes intransigent in resisting the rise of lower classes? What have we learned about that from the recent campaign and election?

Are we still giving lip service, as RN says, to *laissez-faire* economics? Is our economy still unstable at least partly because free?

How does the middle class, as RN remarks on p. 106, express its fear restraints on their powers and privileges? Which powers and privileges? Are we the persons he is talking about? What are our fears? How do our fears differ from those of the “industrial” classes? Relevance this week?