

intelligentsia for 50 years. That is because he has not just been a player in the development of modern sociology, but a playwright. And what is particularly notable is that his work has been incorporated into the bodies of knowledge of other disciplines, particularly economics, criminology, history, philosophy, and political science. Indeed his masterpiece, *Social Theory and Social Structure*, has gone through 30 printings in a dozen languages.

Actually, Merton has always had a multi-disciplinary bent as well as an intellectual star quality that has attracted attention. Educated on scholarships at Temple and Harvard, he was plucked from the ranks at both schools to be his teachers' assistant. As a graduate student he was soon publishing papers of note, and as a novice scholar, he produced studies and paradigmatic

ROBERT MERTON ON "ETHNIC ENMITY AROUND THE WORLD" (1948)

"... under appropriate administrative conditions, the experience of interracial amity can supplant the fear of interracial conflict. These changes... do not occur automatically. The self-fulfilling prophecy, whereby fears are translated into reality, operates only in the absence of deliberate institutional controls. And it is only with the rejection of social fatalism implied in the notion of unchangeable human nature that the tragic circle of fear, social disaster, reinforced fear can be broken..."

"If we find ourselves doubting man's capacity to control man and his society, if we persist in our tendency to find in the patterns of the past the chart of the future, it is perhaps time to take up anew the wisdom of Tocqueville's 112-year-old apothegm: 'What we call necessary institutions are often no more than institutions to which we have grown accustomed.'"

"Nor can widespread, even typical, failures in planning human relations between ethnic groups be cited as evidence for pessimism. In the world laboratory of the sociologist, as in the more secluded laboratories of the physicist and chemist, it is the successful experiment which is decisive and not the thousand and one failures which preceded it." ♦

essays that continue to be among the most often-cited works in the field. He has been invited to address his peers at international symposia for decades, and has been inundated with honorary degrees, 25 at last count, from universities here and abroad.

Erudite, brainy, fastidious, he might well be insufferable if not for the fact that he is also charming and witty — a full-fledged sociological social animal. Who, we are told, entertains his guests with effervescent conversation on a variety of subjects while serving them the "best single malt in Scotland — not Glenfiddich, not Glenlivet, but the peerless Glendronach."

A regular concert-goer at the New York Philharmonic, he could be, until recently, coaxed into a few friendly sets of tennis on the courts at East Hampton where he keeps a summer/weekend home. And there on Long Island, in Manhattan, or elsewhere, he manages to remain Earthbound despite bearing the lofty sobriquet (which he unsuccessfully attempted to edit out of this article) of the "preeminent sociologist in the world."

That preeminent sociologist lives during most of the work week on New York's Upper West Side with his long-time collaborator, colleague, companion, and newly wedded second wife Harriet Zuckerman (Professor Emerita at Columbia and vice president of the Mellon Foundation). The couple occupies an expansive, high-ceilinged, pre-war apartment in a Columbia complex of mid-rises overlooking the Hudson. Despite the building's heady display of Italian marble and ornate ceiling moldings, it manages to be, à la academe, decidedly unpretentious. The elevators creak, the intercom apparatus is ancient, the lobby is doormanless for part of the day.

Dressed in casual Ivy League chic, he ushers us past a handsomely appointed living room and down the hall to his study. Awards, citations, and photographs of students, teachers and other heroes take up an entire wall and, as anticipated, manuscripts, journals, books, papers are everywhere — crammed into three walls of floor-to-ceiling bookcases, on tables, chairs, and, finally, piled on the floor. Twenty or so of these books he has written and co-authored. And six of the manuscripts are unpublished books — some that he's been reworking for 40 years. (A book about historical semantics and the sociology of science written in 1958 is only now on the way to the printer.)

Now in his 84th year, his gait and carriage are those of a much younger man. Long and lean, he has retained his patrician

looks and cultivated manner. A Boston Brahmin? A Newport silk-stocking? A prep-school aristocrat?

None of the above. Surprisingly, the neighborhood of his youth is not one generally credited with producing world-class scholars, but world-class cheesesteaks and pop singers; Merton hails from South Philadelphia.

"He was born at the bottom of the social structure," wrote alumnus Morton Hunt, *BA CAS '41* in a *New Yorker* profile in 1961. The son of Jewish immigrants from Russia, Merton did his growing up around 4th and Dickinson, playing in the street with the neighborhood boys. He recalls that his family (he had an older sister) was forced to move several times because of his father's financially precarious and oft-changing work situations that included dairy store operator, carpenter's assistant, and truck driver. Though not to the manner or to the manor born, he nevertheless pursued grander cultural opportunities, waiting in line for hours for the 25-cent seats in the clouds of the Academy of Music when Leopold Stokowski was leading the Philadelphia Orchestra, frequenting the Strawberry Mansion tennis courts, and braving the waters of the Schuylkill in a canoe. Despite the lack of ready money, Merton reports he never thought of his family as poor because of the variety of civic riches that were available.

During the annual Haskins Lecture about the life of a scholar which he delivered on the 75th anniversary of the American Council of Learned Societies as an "eminent humanist," he cited the cultural resources within walking distance of his home: Independence Hall, the Academy of Music, Leary's Book Store, the Graphic Sketch Club (where chamber music was performed), and, particularly, the nearby Carnegie Branch Library. He describes the 10,000-volume bibliotheca as his "private library" which he began to frequent at age five and where he reports having been indulged during the course of the next ten years by the all-female library staff, who cultivated his interest in literature, science, history, and, most of all, biographies and autobiographies.

South Philadelphia High was where he got a taste for Latin, French, physics and chemistry, but it was in the Carnegie Library that he became intimate with Baudelaire and Flaubert, Ibsen and Shaw by way of the writings of Philadelphia-born arts critic James Gibbons Huneker.

While cultivating an interest in European culture, he simultaneously found him-