

## A Conversation with E. Digby Baltzell

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*E. Digby Baltzell*

I never would have guessed, unless he told me, that Digby Baltzell had hosted a party for numerous friends he had met throughout his life—he was eighty last year—at the Philadelphia Museum of Art the day before I interviewed him. At 9:30 a.m. on the First of May, 1995, he greeted me warmly at his house in downtown Philadelphia near Rittenhouse Square, and proceeded to discourse on subjects of all kinds for the next two-and-one-half hours with tremendous energy. Escorting me into his small but comfortable study in the front room of the house—books on shelves stacked to the ceiling, magazines and papers scattered on tables and furniture—he was off and running before I could turn on my tape recorder. When I gave him a couple of back issues of *Pennsylvania History* to show him the journal I edited, he remarked favorably on the late Dennis Clark, Irish-American historian and political activist. Clark's

friends in their youth called Rittenhouse Square “Rottenhouse Square.” Baltzell was less favorable towards William Penn. “Everybody likes him, but I don’t.” He pointed out some facts about the Commonwealth’s founder which are usually not stressed. Penn hoped to make money from his colony, and lavished more care on his country estate, in the typical fashion of seventeenth-century English gentry and twentieth-century suburbanites, than on the city. And his heirs were the largest tory claimants for property lost during the Revolutionary war.<sup>1</sup>

The brief discussion about Penn not only set the tone for much of our conversation. It encapsulated in less than a minute the moral Baltzell has been trying to convey to Americans for his entire scholarly life: democracy requires a responsible, civic-minded elite—and therefore an elite open to talent—which conveys standards by precept and example to a populace which must be led by someone. The alternative is not egalitarian, benign pluralism or participatory democracy, but a deteriorating situation in which money becomes the only measure of success, and an irresponsible, selfish elite sets the tone for everyone.

The public is eager to read about Baltzell’s message even if America now lacks people willing to practice it. Less than ten days before the interview, he published his most recent book, *Sporting Gentlemen: Men’s Tennis from the Age of Honor to the Cult of the Superstar*.<sup>2</sup> I tried in vain to buy it at half-a-dozen bookstores; it was sold out everywhere. The day after the interview, a local chain store which had originally stocked two copies in the sports section had two dozen prominently displayed in the front of the store! Baltzell can probably no more persuade aspiring athletes that their vocation is of the essence of democracy and character-building, rather than the path to fame and fortune, than he can convince wealthy suburbanites to abandon their estates and return to the cities. But his book’s success is a reminder that we want more from our athletes, who mirror the larger society in which they function, and from our leaders than what Archie Bunker once called “the world’s grossest national product.”

Baltzell is the most quotable of sociologists. When I prepared for the interview by reading, or re-reading, as much of his output as I could cram into my schedule, I found my notes were largely quotes, or reminders to see page such and such for a “great quote.” Here are a few, to encourage readers unfamiliar with his work to immerse themselves in some of the most literate, jargon-free texts sociology has generated:

Viable civilizations are, almost literally, *clothed* in authority; and when the emperor’s clothes are removed, his only recourse is the exercise of *naked* power.<sup>3</sup>

In a very important sense, the so-called *majesty* of the law has always depended on the support of a *nobility* of unwritten class customs.<sup>4</sup>

Perhaps the insane tend to absorb, and carry to irrational extremes, the conventional wisdom of their age; in an age of ideological equality, the insane will use the great equalizer (as the gangsters' "gat" was called in the 1920s) to cut down to size their extraordinary contemporaries.<sup>5</sup>

Throughout history, great men have tended both to have had mothers who were socially, morally, or intellectually superior to their husbands and also to have chosen as wives women who were well above them in one way or another. . . . Of all the thirty-nine presidents [as of 1980] . . . only Nixon, Ford, and Carter married beneath themselves.<sup>6</sup>

"Public purpose" surely dominated over "private interest" under the patrician leadership of the two Roosevelts and Taft, as well as under Wilson and Truman, both from only slightly less-privileged backgrounds. Perhaps this high quality of performance and emphasis on public service has been partly due to the fact that our best aristocratic traditions have stressed *doing* a better job rather than the prevalent, middle-class ideology which has always stressed *getting* a better job.<sup>7</sup>

Things are apparently falling apart in modern America, or so it must seem to those who seek the truth about things, not in churches or Holy Books, but in the media world. Structured by the new priests of the press, that world thrives on reporting the unusual, the bizarre, the titillating, and even the immoral—as opposed to the normal and often moral. Thus, as I write, the Mayflower Madam is visiting Philadelphia in the process of being made rich and famous by media people who, at the same time, must find Mayflower mothers mere bourgeois bores.<sup>8</sup>

The stylish and snobbish Edwardian professor Henry Higgins could never land a job in modern American academia where proper diction is dismissed as elitist, and where modern pygmalions could not care less about polishing the "Pretty Woman's" accent but only want to teach her how to spend in the style of Beverly Hills, where everyone is shamefully affluent and socially placed by the prices of the cars they drive.<sup>9</sup>

Just as the shallow form of socially humiliating anti-Semitism did not exist in liberal and permissive Weimar Germany to anywhere near the extent it did in America during that era, so today our permissive society has never seen so little manifest anti-Semitism. And yet . . . perhaps it has never been so structurally weak at the top levels of leadership and consequently, so I contend, never so vulnerable should some new anti-Semitic movement take hold in America. Nothing in this life comes without a price, and our atomized age of total (even intolerant) tolerance must pay the price of weakened authority and social cohesion. The decline of anti-Semitism is, of course, all to the good. Let us hope that my reflections here on the unanticipated consequences of undoubted progress will never be tested.<sup>10</sup>

Knowledge about things is no substitute for an acquaintance with them. Most meaningful knowledge is highly personal, and theories about the

meaning of facts are rooted in one's autobiography.<sup>11</sup>

The aristocratic view of American society in the second half of the twentieth century demands desegregation. . . . For prejudices are only overcome, as I think everything in this book implies, *after and not before* the members of different ethnic and racial groups have lived and worked together over long periods of time, perhaps several generations.<sup>12</sup>

Although a "classless society" is manifestly a contradiction in terms, this democracy surely cannot survive so long as upper-class status is still denied to those families with minority ethnic and religious affiliations. In this young nation, an ancient mansion of democracy, the stairway of social prestige has been "forever echoing with the wooden shoe going up, and the polished boot descending." When the echoes die, however, the ancient mansion will have been deserted.<sup>13</sup>

Never has America been more classless and egalitarian and never have greedy leadership elites been more generous in rewarding themselves and more contemptuous of the poor.<sup>14</sup>

Baltzell's life is as interesting as his thought. Born on Philadelphia's Rittenhouse Square scarcely three blocks from where he now lives, he grew up in Chestnut Hill in what may probably best be described as genteel poverty. His name came from a former family estate in Fox Chase. He did manage to attend St. Paul's School in New Hampshire and the University of Pennsylvania while doing a variety of jobs including running a tennis club, working as a salesman at Wanamaker's Department Store, and taking tickets, ushering, and parking cars at Franklin Field, Penn's Stadium. After service as a navy pilot and Air Combat Intelligence Officer in World War II in the Pacific Theater, he enrolled in the graduate school of Columbia University in sociology in 1945, and received his doctorate in 1952. He began teaching at his undergraduate alma mater in 1947; while he formally retired in 1986, he continues to teach his popular course on social stratification.<sup>15</sup> And he celebrated his eightieth birthday by publishing *Sporting Gentlemen*, throwing a huge party, and—last but not least—permitting himself to be interviewed for *Pennsylvania History*. We begin *in medias res*, with Professor Baltzell talking about a previous, unfortunate interview:

DB: My wife says "You tell those people too much." Once I was interviewed by *Newsweek*, about *The Protestant Establishment*, which talked about club anti-Semitism. I never belonged to any club, because they're all anti-Semitic, except one. I used to belong to the Franklin Inn Club for intellectuals, but the *Newsweek* reporter quoted me as saying "they were so boring" that I resigned. Can you imagine putting that in the papers? I didn't say "so boring." I said there was a club *bore*, he was so boring that you couldn't listen to anyone else, you had to listen to him. See what I mean. What a mean thing to say.

WP: While you were at Columbia getting your degree in sociology, did you ever study with or meet any of the people in the history department?

DB: I studied with Carter Goodrich on economic history, and I met my best friend in that class. We had coffee every day, he was a Jesuit at Fordham, getting his Ph.D. under a great man who wrote about Rockefeller, Allan Nevins.

WP: Speaking about teaching, what is your approach to teaching?

DB: Well, I'm a great lover of teaching. I've been terribly fortunate to be able to think on my feet; I think in class, I get my ideas in class, I'm a drawer on the blackboard, fantastically, I draw concepts. I started off, believe it or not, way before you were born, in architecture at Penn. Then during the Depression, I had to drop out, and went to the Wharton School of all things. I went to Columbia mainly because I thought I hadn't gotten an adequate education. But it was fortunate because Columbia turned out to have been the best graduate school I could have gone to at the time: [Robert] Merton, [Robert S.] Lynd of *Middletown*, and Robert MacIver. [Paul] Lazarsfeld, of course, was a giant. So it was a wonderful thing, sight unseen. We [my wife and I] lived up on Broadway and 152nd Street; our side was white and the other side was black. We had an apartment where a prostitute had lived and we'd get calls for the whole two years we were there. I think sociology was a kind of hegemonic discipline for my generation. Richard Hofstadter was a friend; he really was a sociologist. He first taught with Charles Mills, at the University of Maryland.

WP: I was about to say the reverse. Your writing reminds me much more of historical writing than that of most sociologists.

DB: I like to think of myself as a historian with a sociological point of view.

WP: Maybe that's why your books are so interesting.

DB: I think I do the kind of history that Hofstadter did. I still think his *Social Darwinism in America* was his greatest book . . .

WP: It was his first book, too.

DB: Well, and this would apply to Tocqueville, he was a thinker about American history, more than a digger of facts about American history. You need both. Where did you say you taught?

WP: At a branch campus of Penn State about five miles north of Philadelphia, the Ogontz Campus.

DB: My mother went to the Ogontz School, and I've got a picture, it was a military school for girls. Her name was Caroline (Lina) Duhring.

WP: We have an archives room that has most of the old memorabilia and documents of the school on campus.

DB: You know where the word Ogontz came from. That was Jay Cooke's house.

WP: Well, John Lukacs made the point in one of his books that so few of the great mansions surrounding Philadelphia survive.<sup>16</sup> They've been torn down, or turned into schools, convents, or something else.

DB: The Catholic church owns a lot of them. Chestnut Hill used to have the Disston Castle, a real castle. The best surviving castle left is Beaver College, beautiful. It used to be the Harrison Castle, owned by the Harrison sugar trust. They made billions. Beaver College, which used to be in Jenkintown, bought it when the Harrisons died. So now you're moving to Penn State's main campus. There's a fellow up there, Bob Murray, who wrote on the presidency. I used his research in my articles on great presidents and Supreme Court justices.<sup>17</sup>

WP: Actually, Murray retired over ten years ago.

DB: I think the idea that I'm a sociologist looking at history is good. You see, I use names. If you try to write a history in terms of "the people," that's just statistics. It isn't just the upper class that is historical. Now Rosa Parks is a historical person, much more than a lot of upper-class people out on the Main Line. Many of them had ancestors who were historical figures. But you can't write history about "the bottom," because it's just statistics. But you can write about Martin Luther King, you can write about Arthur Ashe, unfortunately you can write about [Lee Harvey] Oswald. One of my good friends is [the sociologist] Robert Nisbet, and one of the things he asked me is "Why do I find myself becoming more friendly with historians?" I said, "Bob, it's probably because historians deal in people, and we deal in abstractions." And to deal in abstractions, in a way, is to dehumanize. A man in our history department gave a talk which sounded like a demography course I taught twenty-five years ago.

The British have a way of making sense of these things. A leading British historian begins a work: "Statistics are not interested in human beings. They are not interested in Mrs. Jones. They are interested in Mrs. Jones as a housewife, as a consumer, as a WASP, and so forth." I'm not a WASP, I'm *me*. One of my aspects is I'm Protestant and white, but it isn't me. One of the great books I assigned year after year was called *Southern Politics* by V. O. Key. Before he died Key wrote on the dehumanization of polling. In 1960, Rockefeller waited for the polls to run against Nixon. If he had his convictions, if he had declared earlier, he would have beaten Nixon, and he would have beaten Kennedy, easily.

WP: Harry Truman didn't believe in polls. If he did, he wouldn't have run that marvelous campaign and defeated Dewey.

DB: A reviewer of my new book for the *Inquirer* said: don't think that because Baltzell is a conservative he's sympathetic with Gingrich. The answer to that is I'm a conservative; Gingrich is a rightist. He's not a conservative, he's a populist, and no conservative was ever a populist. I think in that way he may be dangerous.

WP: There's a tradition in America of resentment against the elite. People are taught by populists and others to see "the elite" as both homogeneous—there's

dehumanization again—and bad, and I don't think it's necessarily either.

**DB:** There is no such thing as “the elite” that is doing things. People are doing things. Look at [Robert] McNamara [former Secretary of Defense who in 1995 published his memoirs regretting American participation in the Vietnam War]. I was in Canada about two years after the Kennedy assassination, and I was reading *McLean's*, the *Time* magazine of Canada. It said that in an egalitarian age people shoot exceptional men, and they shot Kennedy. Now Gingrich wouldn't do that, of course, but kooks take what's in the air, and they do it insanely. He contributes to this.

**WP:** They take things to their conclusion. If government is bad, shooting leaders is the way to get rid of it.

**DB:** The liberal has to protect himself from the left, and the conservative has to protect himself from the right.

**WP:** The problem is thirty years ago, the liberals were riding so high a lot of conservatives were willing to throw in with whoever sided with the right.

**DB:** Well, the conservatives are in now, but there's a lot of paranoia. A very important thing is not to hate the opposition. That's where sports are terribly important, and I think we're losing that, because now winning is everything. That's hopeless, and in politics to win permanently is a totalitarian state. You want to win, shake hands, and fight another day, and also know you're not always right. I knew one of the trustees of Lincoln University for about thirty years, and I gave a talk he attended where I said democracy was very closely tied to the sporting ethic. He said, “Digby, that was a very interesting remark. Nkrumah, you know [leader of Ghana], was a dictator, he went to Lincoln and he took no part in athletics.” But a very great athlete down there, of course I don't remember his name, was a sportsman and a very great democratic leader in an African country. Take the Germans, they have no idea of sportsmanship. You take the Harvard-Yale game, the rowing matches, the sporting rituals at college, and in England; there's no such thing in Germany, no Heidelberg-Bonn football classic. Somewhere I said suppose Karl Marx had been brought up on the sporting ethic and been captain of a football team or cricket team, history might have been very different. But I think we've lost that. Once, Yale produced most of the great football coaches in the country, and the greatest man produced by Yale was Alonzo Stagg. He looked on football as a moral education. They don't today, although I think Joe Paterno at Penn State does. In this article, I mentioned Paterno, and I immediately got an invitation to a big Paterno dinner. It was in the summer, and I wasn't around.<sup>18</sup>

**WP:** Yes, he not only coaches football; he was at the head of a campaign to build a new wing for the library and gave a lot of his own money, too.

**DB:** I wrote a little piece on Hobie Baker, the only guy who was ever in the Hall of Fame for both football and ice hockey. I said that the spirit of Hobie Baker lived on in Knut Rockne. Knut was asked “what was your best team.”

He said, "I don't know, it depends on how the boys turn out." I said it's the same way with Paterno; he could have made twice as much money in the professional ranks. But he's not a football coach at Penn State; he's the hero of Happy Valley.<sup>19</sup>

**WP:** He probably could have won a few more games if he cared a little less about his players' education.

**DB:** Right. But there are always, at last, men like that. The black tennis coach, James Wilkerson, for instance. This is what's a tragedy. The baseball strike and so on is ruining the moral side of sport. How did men get their morals? By sport.

**WP:** And by community too. I remember the old Brooklyn Dodgers. They lived in the community and came to the park on the same train as the fans. They didn't live off in some million-dollar suburb.

**DB:** I hate the man who moved the Dodgers to California, O'Malley. Where'd he go to college—Penn-Wharton School! I don't know him at all but I hate what he stood for. Take race relations. One summer they were having a very bad time in Detroit, but no violence broke out, and I think it was because the Tigers won the pennant that year. I used to go up to the Phillies games on North Broad Street in the middle of the ghetto. You'd park your car, there was no trouble. Sports rises up above race relations. The kids are not given ideals by this baseball strike—how does this effect them? Also, do those rich people realize how many people they have put out of jobs, who work in the park? [Phillies' owner] Giles has paid them all through the strike, even though they were doing nothing. Other people laid them off.

**WB:** Were you a tennis player? Do you still play? I had a friend who played into his early nineties.

**DB:** A friend my age, eighty, says he's playing better than ever. I, unfortunately, had a bad heart attack about twelve years ago, so I stopped tennis. But I love walking. It takes less time, you can walk right out the door, and you can talk with your good friends. I played tennis regularly before that. But now I study its history. Even the broadcaster, Bud Collins, said he learned something from my book, so I guess it's pretty good history.

**WB:** The general thrust of the book is that tennis has gone the way of many things, from a gentleman's game to a way to make money. Tennis illustrates your general point about America, that there used to be local elites with at least some sense of civic responsibility whereas now money is all that matters.

**DB:** That's true for everybody, even college presidents. When Sheldon Hackney left as President of Penn, he was the only man in the upper administration who had been there ten years. And none of them were graduates of Penn. Thirty years ago almost all of them were. Now I don't approve of that, but I don't approve of having nobody, and they come and go, they have no loyalty, and they're like business executives.



WP: It's even that way with professors. The best way to get a raise is to get a better offer from somewhere else.

DB: They're encouraging disloyalty! Every time I came up, they said, "Why give Digby a raise? He's not going to leave." A new dean came to the Wharton School, and said I was the only guy in the sociology department he ever heard of, and I was the lowest paid in the whole department. So he gave me a \$2,000 raise which was a lot in those days. Well, that used to be true in a lot of areas. I picked up a paperback, totally in white, with the letters B-E-A-R totally in red; it was about Alabama football coach Bear Bryant. What a fascinating person. When you went to the state, you wanted to meet him before the governor. He left scholarships, and not for athletics.

WP: People like that set the tone for a place.

DB: One of the most famous doctors at Harvard, Arthur Schlesinger's father-in-law, was offered twice as much money by the Mayo clinic. I don't need twice as much money, he said. All I need is fifty cents for a haircut once a month, and fifty cents a day to get lunch. I think we are such an atomized democracy that there's no culture left and money is the only thing people think is worthwhile. We had this football coach [Jerry Berndt] who won five Ivy League championships in a row, and then he went to Rice to make twice the money. I think he should have stayed at Penn and created a dynasty.

WP: It's like Paterno, there are very few like him and Bear Bryant. This other fellow will never be a legend.

DB: Yes. He's what I call a success. Paterno, Rockne, are what I call an accomplishment. Van Gogh, tremendous accomplishment, a failure. A lot of successful people accomplish nothing. In my book, at the nationals in 1930, the champion, Doeg, played Barry Wood from Harvard, a three-letter man all the way through: football, hockey, and baseball. In his senior year he added a fourth in tennis. He carried Doeg to five sets, and he was Phi Beta Kappa, a Rhodes Scholar, and he died as head of medicine at Johns Hopkins.

WP: I was going to ask you about Philadelphia in the twenties and thirties.

DB: In the thirties, when I became mature, I came to Penn in 1935. The thirties was the last decade when the city was run by the upper class. That's why the cut-off date for *Philadelphia Gentlemen* is 1940. I happen to think that wars are more revolutionary than revolutions. Roosevelt was in the White House, the WASP establishment ran the country before the war, and that's the last decade they did. The Indian summer of the WASP golden age was Truman through Kennedy, and the real jolt came with Kennedy and then the trouble at Berkeley and then '68. I think we've lost our rudder since then. Before, the poor had the same values as the elite. They were deserving poor, the families held together, and Philadelphia was an infinite number of very tight neighborhoods. It was safe. When I went to Columbia in 1945, I walked all over Harlem; you wouldn't today. It's unbelievable this city, compared to then,

with this tremendous boom. It's like Sydney, Australia, where I was in 1942 during the war. It was a very small, Victorian city then. The whole world has changed tremendously. No stop signs, then, in Philadelphia. There were no green and red lights at the corner of Broad and Walnut. There was a policeman with green and red signs. Senator George Wharton Pepper would walk across the street. "Hi, Senator, how are you," says the cop." Today, they wouldn't even recognize Specter, would they?

WP: And I doubt he'd be walking across the street by himself.

DB: I feel very badly. I live here in the city, not on the Main Line. I feel I ought to be confronted with crime, street begging, and the tragedy of what's happening to this city. I grew up in Chestnut Hill, but we shopped in town, as we called it. There are now families out on the Main Line who have never been in town. I gave a speech at the honor society at a high school, the Haverford School. I said how many of you have been in town in the last six months? None of them. This is very sad.

WP: Is this because the elite has abdicated or have they been pushed out?

DB: They haven't been pushed out. They can live here. I'm living here. I'm breathing. I hate to tell you, Rittenhouse Square when I was young was entirely WASP. Now it's predominantly Jewish. I hand it to the Jewish people—they've stayed in town. Now they're an infinitely urban people. One of the things about the WASP is he's a frontiersman. He's a country person. The average Frenchman can't wait to get into Paris and get on the back of a woman. The average Englishman can't wait to get into the county and get on the back of his horse. My women students go crazy at that, but it's true! Lord Russell, who put through the British reform bill, opened the letters from his estate manager before the state papers. When you have an aristocratic, hierarchical society, the rich and the poor live next door to each other. Here's the Duke of Alba's palace, right in the heart of the poverty; less so in England, they're suburban like us. I hate to tell you that in a democratic society the rich escape from the poor geographically, because they're not respected by the poor.

Rittenhouse Square was perfectly safe in the past, but the reason was people who did not live there were not welcome. Now I think it's human progress to have people use Rittenhouse Square, but in another way it makes the square less safe. Another good thing now is that when I was young, there was never anybody in Fairmont Park on either side of the Schuylkill. Today, it's a paradise in the summer. It's wonderful. The answer is there's no progress: things are better in some ways, in others worse. Without a doubt, the average black in America is much better off today than in the past, in spite of the tragedies of the ghetto. But the tragedy of the ghetto is that thousands of blacks have been able to escape, the capable blacks have escaped, unfortunately. I don't like to think that the capable WASPs have escaped to the Main Line. I'd like to think they're still around here.

WP: I read your essays on the Philadelphia black and Jewish communities. It seems they too need an elite that sets a moral tone and has a sense of civic responsibility, just as does society as a whole.<sup>20</sup>

DB: I think the city was made for man, and civis and civility are urban, entirely. That's another thing about Pennsylvania. Penn didn't like the city, he liked the country.

WP: What about Benjamin Franklin?

DB: Franklin was a genius. He led everything, he was a one-man town.

WP: I read an article of yours entitled "Five Contemporary Benjamin Franklins," about some modern citizens who were both personal and civic achievers; it was very uplifting that such people still exist.<sup>21</sup>

DB: To me too.

WP: Do you see a lot of hope for Philadelphia, and America, or are you basically pessimistic?

DB: I'm not. I'm a great admirer of [Mayor Edward] Rendell, I taught Rendell. I have great hopes for Philadelphia; I wish we could get that German firm to take over the navy yard [no longer in use]. Greatest shipbuilders in the world. If this Convention Center pans out. . . . This is the heart of America, historically. We're doing better. The Flyers are doing better, maybe the Phillies will. I loved the championship team in '93. It was incredible. I was a catcher in school.

WP: Even in sports, things weren't always so great in the Golden Age. The Black Sox scandal, and whatever his virtues, Babe Ruth was hardly a moral example.

DB: The worst thug who ever played baseball was Ty Cobb. Pete Rose had nothing on him. And Connie Mack, the beloved owner of the A's [Philadelphia Athletics], he shouldn't have been loved. He ran that team to make money, not to win. He sold all the good players. Do you realize his grandson is a [U.S. Congressional] representative in Florida, Palm Beach. Once, I was in left-field and watched the Yankees get nine runs in the first inning. Both Gehrig and Ruth hit home runs. It was awful.

WP: How would you look back at the way you grew up?

DB: We always thought we were totally broke, but we were really in the top one-tenth of one per cent; I always thought we didn't have any money. But as I look back, I led a really privileged life. It was the Depression, but we had a great deal of moral restraint. Most of my friends, especially the girls, were virgins when they got married. They drank too much maybe, but they didn't break things up the way kids do today. Yet we had a great deal of freedom.

In tennis, now they've got a stop watch telling you when you have to sit down and how many times you can bounce the ball. Rules are a bureaucrat's idea of civility. My view of a class idea of civility is informal, it's restraint. Some wit checked the tennis timer—if he bounced the ball eighteen times, he got away with it. If nineteen, not. Jimmy Connors was the first terminal

bouncer. One of my friend's sons was playing on the college tennis team. My friend was playing with him and he bounced the ball. Afterwards my friend said to him, it's not very thoughtful to your opponents, that eternal bouncing. He said, Pop, I never thought of that. He never did it again. In college, it's amazing these rules about sexual harassment or p.c. [political correctness] could happen. But in a bureaucratic society, it's the only answer.

WP: "Someday, we Americans may come to realize honor and decency must be cultivated, not legislated," you once wrote.<sup>22</sup>

DB: Honor and decency come from the top down. Ostracism is class ostracism. Mass ostracism is impossible. Penn doesn't ostracize anybody, but I said suppose the fraternities ostracized anyone who cheated. Would cheating go down? Yes. One of the tragedies now is that to be anti-black, anti-Semitic, or anti-any group is more of a transgression than to be a bloody liar or an adulterer. Personal morality is changed into group morality, and it will never work.

WP: In a totally different vein, which scholars' work do you admire the most?

DB: One of the best articles I ever read was by Andrew Hacker. He's always reviewing thirty books at once, though [in the *New York Review of Books*]. I'm a great admirer of S. M. Lipset. His new book was castigated in the *New York Times*. It was an excellent book.<sup>23</sup> I liked Christopher Lasch but I think his latest book on the elite is off-base.<sup>24</sup> I admire Tocqueville; Jeanne Kirkpatrick, I assigned her work on authoritarianism and totalitarianism for years;<sup>25</sup> V. O. Key; I've always been an admirer of Walker Percy, who's about the same age as me. I like his biographer, Jay Tolson, too.<sup>26</sup> This man is awfully good.

WP: Could you tell me a little about your family?

DB: I met my first wife sixty years ago this September. Yesterday, I gave an enormous party for my friends from childhood all the way up through today at the Museum. Fifty years ago the bomb was dropped. We moved to Harlem that September. She was a debutante, and fifty years ago there weren't many debutantes who would have preferred Harlem to the Main Line. My first wife [Jane Piper] was an artist. My daughter is an architect. She had a lot of trouble getting a job. In Cambridge, Mass., where she lives, there are too many architects and not enough buildings.

WP: John Lukacs told me Boston was too intellectual.<sup>27</sup> I guess all the intellectuals want to live there.

DB: Yes, but there's something right here that's better than anything in Boston. George Allen's (bookstore, at 20th and Walnut Streets). I knew the world's leading expert on Tocqueville, who sold his library to the University of California for \$60,000. Now he has a better one. But he told me that there's nothing in London equal to this shop. Allen is great on classics and literature.

WP: One of the best things about your books is that you show how the seventeenth century, how history, still matters. Even people who didn't arrive in America until 1900 who came to New York, Boston, or Philadelphia, were

shaped by those cities and the people who founded them centuries before.

DB: They're reprinting *Puritan Boston and Quaker Philadelphia* at Transaction Books; it's coming out in paperback. But the real tragedy of this country is multi-culturalism. Against that, I almost had tears in my eyes, I was down at the Visitors' Center in Society Hill, and they have a wonderful movie on the founding of this country. It was filled with a lot of black kids and their parents. I was so thrilled, they loved it, it's their heritage, too. People who want to go back to Africa and so forth, they're like people on the Main Line who are obsessed with their ancestry. The people who are doing things are obsessed with future. I just read today you can't do anything about your past, forget it. But you can do something about your future. When people ask me about genealogists and ancestor worship societies, don't talk to me, I hate it. American blacks are American. When our troops landed at Anzio in World War II and went through Italy they realized they were Americans, not Italians. What people don't realize is that from the founding of this country we had a totally dominant WASP upper class from the days of George Washington in the 1780s to the new upper class in the 1880s and down to the 1940s. In an ethnically mixed society, a homogeneous WASP elite. Now we don't have it, the ideas are coming up from the bottom, moral standards are coming from victims. Now victims are very interested in ethnicity. These are dehumanizing, demonizing values. Lipset and myself have the same values. He grew up in a ghetto in Brooklyn worshipping the Dodgers, and I grew up in Chestnut Hill, but I feel much better talking to him than I do to most people of my own background. I'm not talking to your background, I'm talking to you.

I don't know what's replaced the elite today. We don't really have a meritocracy, we have a credential-ocracy. A young girl came to interview me, she was a live wire, from some hick college in Pennsylvania, but the gist of it is she's competing with all these Harvard and Yale girls. She was really the top. She said, it's tough, but I'm ahead of all of them, because I work harder. But they're resting on their credentials. And their credentials are almost as bad as the people I know who are living on their family credentials.

WP: It's interesting how the themes of your work have been picked up by early American historians. Those who work on the Middle Colonies talk about how the real, or typical America, came out of the Middle Colonies—diversity, toleration. New England historians respond yes, but all that was exceptional came from their region. We'd still be colonies if we'd waited for Pennsylvania.

DB: But it [New England] *was* typical of America. I didn't write that book about Philadelphia and Boston so much because I cared about Philadelphia and Boston. It is unbelievable how lacking in distinguished men Pennsylvania has been. Look at the state's great men—Scranton, a Connecticut Yankee. Pinchot, the best governor before the Second World War, a Yale man, a Yankee. Franklin, born in Boston. There have been more Harvard and Yale graduates

in the top jobs than Penn. The first governor [of the state—Thomas Mifflin] went to the College of Philadelphia, and the next one who went [to Penn, which is what it became] was [George] Leader, in the twentieth century, in my class, and he went to the College of Education. We are lowering distinction. We've never had more capable men, and never had fewer distinguished men. We've never had more first-rate second-rate tennis players, or fewer distinguished tennis players. I think we do lack great men. The presidency has declined. The only two termers since Roosevelt are Eisenhower and Reagan. Take Massachusetts. The most distinguished school in Massachusetts, which produced more distinguished leaders than any other school, is the Boston Latin School, a public school. Philadelphia, what are the oldest schools? Episcopal Academy, private; Penn Charter, private; Germantown academy, private. In Massachusetts before the Civil War, Harvard, Amherst, Williams and Tufts. Pennsylvania had 31 colleges before the Civil War but all sectarian schools. I think about ten are left. What are we doing today? The public school system is breaking down, and we're getting the private school system. The Catholics are doing much better. Responsible black parents work like hell to get their kids into Catholic school, they even convert to Catholicism.

Our talk continued as we left the house and walked through Rittenhouse Square. As I looked at the high-rise apartments that have replaced almost all of the Victorian mansions that formerly dominated the square, the scene summed up what Professor Baltzell had been saying throughout the interview. On the one hand, exclusivity and elegance were gone. On the other, many more people, of different sorts, lived around the square and enjoyed its still-charming space. We then headed to George Allen's bookstore (listed as William Allen's in the phone book). Here indeed was another world. A card catalogue listed thousands of books currently, formerly, or potentially in stock, and names of those who had or were interested in buying them. The two-tiered store resembled an old-fashioned gentleman's library more than a business emporium. There was no computer to be endlessly fiddled with as the establishment does its inventory on your time, but a Royal, manual typewriter that wrote letters, not e-mail, informing clients their books were in. The proprietor talked knowledgeably about the price and availability of eighteenth-century editions of the writings of William Penn I was interested in purchasing. As I left, reflecting on George Allen's shop and Digby Baltzell, I could only hope that I was observing a world preserved, rather than a world about to be lost forever.

## Notes

1. For Baltzell's views on Penn, see "Cultural Pluralism in Modern America and William Penn's Colony of Pennsylvania," in *The Protestant Establishment Revisited*, ed. Howard G. Schneidermann (New Brunswick: Transaction Publishers, 1991), 217-239. Baltzell is the author of all works cited unless otherwise noted. The articles on Clark and Penn appeared in the July and October, 1994, issues respectively of *Pennsylvania History*.
2. *Sporting Gentlemen: Men's Tennis from the Age of Honor to the Cult of the Superstar* (New York: The Free Press, 1995).
3. "To Be A Phoenix: Reflections on Two Noisy Ages of Prose," *American Journal of Sociology*, 78 (1972), 210.
4. "Goodbye to All That: Upper-Class Origins of American Sport," in *Judgment and Sensibility: Religion and Stratification*, ed. Howard G. Schneidermann (New Brunswick: Transaction Publishers, 1994), 151.
5. "Cultural Pluralism in Modern America," 224.
6. "Social Class in the Oval Office," with Howard G. Schneidermann, *Society*, 25 Sept.-Oct. (1988), 45.
7. *Ibid.*
8. "An Exploration of Subculture in American Life," *The Philadelphia Inquirer*, October 19, 1986.
9. "Canon and Class," *Society*, 29 (1991), 9.
10. Preface to Murray Friedman, ed., *Philadelphia Jewish Life, 1940-1985* (Philadelphia: Seth Press, 1986).
11. *Puritan Boston and Quaker Philadelphia* (New York: The Free Press, 1979), ix.
12. *The Protestant Establishment: Aristocracy & Caste in America* (New York: Random House, 1964), 384.
13. *Philadelphia Gentlemen: The Making of a National Upper Class* (Glencoe, Ill.: The Free Press, 1958), 396.
14. "Canon and Class," *Society* 29, (1991).
15. A biographical sketch of Baltzell's life, written by Howard G. Schneidermann, appears in the "Introduction" to *The Protestant Establishment Revisited*.
16. John Lukacs, *Philadelphia: Patricians and Philistines, 1900-1950* (New York: Farrar, Strauss, Giroux, 1981), 334-336.

17. Both articles with Howard G. Schneidermann: "Social Class in the Oval Office," *Society*, 25 (1988) and "From Rags to Riches: The Horatio Alger Myth and the Supreme Court," *ibid.*, 28 (1991); Robert K. Murray and Tim H. Blessing, *Greatness in the White House: Rating the Presidents Washington through Carter* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1988).
18. "Goodbye to All That," *supra* n. 4.
19. *Ibid.*
20. Introduction to W. E. B. DuBois, *The Philadelphia Negro*, reprint edition (New York: Schocken Books, 1967); "The Jewish Communities of Philadelphia and Boston, 1740-1940: A Tale of Two Cities," with Allen Glicksman and Jacquelyn Litt, in *Judgment and Sensibility*, 229-265.
21. "Five Contemporary Benjamin Franklins," *Agenda*, 2 (1981).
22. "Goodbye to All That," 151.
23. S. M. Lipset, with Earl Raab, *Jews and the New American Scene* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press), 1995.
24. Christopher Lasch, *The Revolt of the Elites, and the Betrayal of Democracy* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1995).
25. Jeanne Kirkpatrick, *Dictatorships and Double Standards: Rationalism and Reason in Politics* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1982).
26. Jay Tolson, *Pilgrim in the Ruins: A Life of Walker Percy* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1995).
27. See my interview with John Lukacs, *Pennsylvania History*, 61 (1994), 271-284.

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In 1989, the University of Pennsylvania Press published *Social Class and Democratic Leadership: Essays in Honor of E. Digby Baltzell*, edited by Harold J. Bershad.