

In 1939, shortly before the outbreak of World War II in Europe and while the Great Depression was still in full swing, Funk & Wagnall's published a 348-page book entitled *You Americans*, and subtitled: *Fifteen Foreign Press Correspondents Report Their Impressions of the United States and Its People*.

Chapters included "You-and-We-Americans" by Chile's Carlos Dávila, "What is This Aloofness?" by Frenchman Raoul de Roussy de Sales, "You American Women" by Mira Gavrilovitch of Yugoslavia, "From the Argentine Angle" by Alberto Caprile, Jr., "A Dutchman Comes to New Amsterdam," by Bernard Person, "Candid Comment from a Mexican Cousin" by Antonio Iglesias, "What America Teaches the Foreign Correspondent" by Switzerland's Guenther Reinhardt, "Education and Politics in the United States" by Naboth Hedin of Sweden, "An Italian View of America's Crisis" by Gian Gaspare Napolitano, "Your Country and My People" by George Kao of China, "America from the Lecture Platform" by Hungarian Emil Lengyel, "Your Hollywood" by German Curt Riess, "American Goodwill Toward Japan" by Yasuo E. Muraoka, and "The 'Real' America in the West" by Englishman Harold Butcher. The obvious theme for all chapters was "You Americans"; therefore that phrase was used frequently in each chapter.

Former bantamweight world champion boxer Pete Sanstol, a Norwegian who would become an American citizen in early 1943, wrote the fifteenth and final chapter, entitled "From Prize Ring to Press Box." Here's how it goes:

Editor's Introduction

PETE SANSTOL, born in Moi, Norway, 1905. Amateur boxer in 1920, amateur bantamweight champion of Norway in 1923, and professional in 1925. Fought more than 200 times in Europe and America. Covered sporting events for Norwegian newspapers and is now correspondent for Tidens Tegn, Oslo, Norway.

FROM PRIZE RING TO PRESS BOX By Pete Sanstol

I

Right off the bat, I am going to admit that what I say may seem a little mixed up. But I am in a peculiar position. I am an ex-pugilist with fourteen years' ring experience. I am a sports correspondent of a Norwegian paper. I am a Norwegian immigrant. And what somehow seems the most thrilling of all the experiences of a very active life is that I am about to become an American citizen. All these things naturally influence my impression of America.

I have never thought it was my business to criticize the United States. If I did not like the country I wouldn't stay here. I have never had any patience with the foreign critics who are no sooner off the boat than they begin to tell Americans how to run their country. The soapbox orator who shouts in broken English about what is wrong with the United States is simply a very young man in a hell of a hurry. His old country took centuries to evolve its present civilization, but he wants to change the new country over night.

If you really want to know what I think of you Americans down deep in my heart you can guess it from the fact that I shall be a full-fledged citizen in a few months. And a little further on I am going to say something about the experiences and the reflections which made me pick America as my adoptive mother country.

But it is time for me to introduce myself. I was born in Moi, Norway. As a young boy I was what you folks would call a "sissy." But at fifteen I broke away from the too tender coddling of my mother and three older sisters and went in for amateur boxing. At eighteen I was amateur bantamweight champion of Norway. In 1925, I turned professional fighter in Oslo, Norway, and went at once to Berlin, where I won three fights. Within a year I was in Paris, where an American manager saw me and brought me to the United States. I landed in New York City in 1927.

What a life! I could not speak much English, and so I found it very difficult to understand the people around me. They were so different from those I had known in the old world! I even found the Norwegians, the Swedes, the Danes, the German, the Frenchmen and the Englishmen changed by these United States. How had they changed? I find it very hard to explain. For one thing, they had acquired the American sense of humor. For you Americans certainly have a delightful lightness of nature in many things. When the boat docked here on my first trip from Europe, the newsboys came on board. It was Sunday, and the papers were wrapped in the "funnies." Those sheets were the first things most of the Americans opened. How they laughed and enjoyed the antics of the comic boys and girls! The Europeans, standing about, including myself, thought that very silly, indeed. Just another proof, they said, that the Americans had no intellectual development. Now I understand. For I, too, do the same thing. Why? Because those comics are the spirit of America - fresh, happy, even expressing a certain depth of homely wisdom in a new way.

Here in the United States I found that the boxers, too, were different. My manager, who was also my teacher, and by his kindness to me my second father, told me to act like a gentleman at any cost. I tried my best. I soon discovered that in America you could be accepted as gentleman outside the prize ring - even though you could not always be a gentleman inside of it.

It so happened that my first opponent here had a careless way of sticking his thumb in my eye. After each of his repeated jabs with his thumb, in which he apparently tried his best to gouge out my optics, he would politely say, "Oh, I am so sorry." I would reply in my best Scandinavian English: "You are welcome." When the fight ended I had two closed eyes, and was blinded temporarily.

I was angry and sore while recuperating in a dark room and didn't make any bones about it to my manager. "Is this boxing?" I asked him. He said, "Sure, you're in America now, and over here we have one rule of the game which says, that if a Palooka jabs a finger in your eye you stick two fingers in his eye."

This impressed me, as you may believe from the fact that as soon as I was able to start training again I drew two circles about the size of a man's eye on a hanging sandbag and religiously practised poking my thumb within those circles. In fact, I became expert.

My manager didn't know what an apt pupil I was. When I asked him for a return match with the same man who had jabbed my eyes so unmercifully, he said, "Listen, Pete, the last time I had to put you in a dark room after the fight. Probably another time you'll wind up in a hospital." But I knew what I was doing and I insisted on the return match.

When we were in the squared circle, the referee called us together and gave us the usual instructions, ending up by saying, "Shake hands, boys, and come out fighting!"

We went to our corners and the gong sounded. We both danced out into the middle of the ring. I remember that in my first meeting with my opponent, he had made a gesture of shaking hands, and that when I had lowered my hands to shake hands with him, he had let me have it with the palm of his hands on my cheek bone, and his thumb gouging my eye. This time things were to be different! Before he had time even to get up his hands, I let him have a right and left, my thumbs aimed at his right and left eye. My aim was perfect. The tables had been turned. He yelled loud to the referee, "This guy is 'moldering' me."

The referee didn't stop the fight, but told us to get back in there and throw our punches. The lad couldn't take it. The fight was stopped in the third round and I was awarded a technical knockout. My opponent has never been in the ring since. [*Our note: We are unable to figure out which fighter Pete is talking about. It could be Jimmy Palumba, but their second fight was not a TKO for Pete; or maybe it was Nick deSalvo. It appears that Pete never had a second fight with his first American opponent, Tony Abrusci.*]

This gouging story might be taken as a contradiction of my appreciation of the American spirit of fair play in sports. But professional prize-fighting is not a sport, it is a business. And in business, it is the American tradition to beat your competitor any way you can. American business, in spite of new ethics and new regulations [SEC regulations, for example, due to the 1929 stock market crash], is still "every man for himself and the devil take the hindmost."

I am often asked whether there is any difference in the methods used for developing a fighter in Europe and in the United States. There is all the difference in the world. European boxers are trained in the English method, developing what is called the English style. This consists largely of straight lefts, and again straight lefts. The European boxer poses with a very stiff backbone, standing extremely erect. His stance would make an American audience laugh. In America, the methods employed seek to develop an individual style. Thus, Jack Dempsey fought best in a crouch, while Tommy Laughlin [*Loughran?*] and Gene Tunney developed the English style. Tony Galento could never be taught to throw a straight left, as his style depends upon a crouch and "hay-makers" starting from the floor. Yet, all of these men held the championship in their respective divisions, except Galento, and he gave a good account of himself in his championship fight with Joe Louis.

In Europe, the public is trained to look for finer points of exhibition boxing. An audience in London will sit for fifteen rounds rigidly hypnotized at an exhibition of boxing in which a straight left is the only punch thrown. You hear the audience cry, "Look at that left!" They leave the hall feeling they have had their money's worth.

The American audience doesn't give a whoop whether the fighter uses a straight left or a right hook. They crave blood. They want dynamite tossed into the ring at one-second intervals, and no audience in the world will pay so much at the gate to see what they want. For example, the American sports arena has never seen drama so packed with thrills as when Firpo, the Bull of the Pampas, knocked Champion Dempsey through the ropes into the press box. When Dempsey was shoved back through the ropes and into the ring he separated Firpo from his ambitions for the count of ten. The Louis-Galento fiasco was packed with thrills and action. Everybody was happy.

Action, punch, color! Those are the three demands of an American boxing crowd, or of any sports audience, for that matter. These things are much more important than an exhibition of skill or a close contest lasting long enough to give the spectators their money's worth on a time basis. After a one-sided match ending with a knockout in a round or two, a European audience would raise a riot and storm the box office, demanding their money back.

"Color" in this sense is a word that I wouldn't know how to translate into any European language I know. And a "colorful fighter" is unknown in sport discussions in the old country.

And "punch," by the way, is wanted in all sports: the "smash" and service aces of Tilden, the home runs of Babe Ruth, the spectacular scoring forward-pass in football.

The American ideal of fair play appeals to me as being one of this country's greatest assets. Fair play in America means just what it says. While abroad, I read over and over in European papers that you Americans always won because you cheated. That absolutely is not true. You have been made the "goat" by European sports writers.

If I were asked to make a constructive criticism of American sportsmanship, it would be that there is an apparent lack of discipline in professional fighting here in America. Probably this is inevitable when one considers that the American style of boxing is based on individuality, and that a boxer gets a chance at the championship crown not only because he is good, but because he has nerve enough to say through the newspapers: "I'll fight that big bum."

I have sat in press boxes in Europe and in America, and one of the first things that struck me as being sportsmanlike here was the exchange of ideas and opinions among sports writers working for competing papers. Here I feel perfectly at liberty to ask Damon Runyon's opinion, for he would give it to me. One hears constantly, "Did you see that?" "Did you notice that right?" etc., all expressed freely, so that everybody could hear it. In Europe the sports writer is secretive, and holds his hand over his notes as he writes, and if you were to ask his opinion, what you would get would be anything but his true opinion. To find out what a European sports writer really thought, you would have to read his column the next morning.

But let me come back to finish up my ring history in a few words. My hardest fight and greatest failure was against Al Brown when we fought for the world's title at the Forum in Montreal. The hardest punch I ever received was also in a Montreal ring. That night Bernasconi clipped me in our fight at the Ball Park. My fight with Escobar in Montreal was the wind-up of twelve years in the American ring. [*Actually, it was eight years from 1927.*] What a terrible pasting I took that night! It seemed to me that I had been beaten so badly that all my former victories must surely be overshadowed. I doubted that I could ever show my face again on the streets of Montreal.

However, when I became the manager of Jarl Johnson [*Johansen*], we received an offer for a bout in Montreal. I got off the train in the Canadian city with some trepidation, which continued during my first day in town. I was crossing a crowded street intersection, however, when a traffic cop saw me and yelled, "Hey, Pete, mon ami, Pete." He stopped the traffic. He rushed over and threw both arms around me and gave me a terrific hug. I did not know his name then, and I still do not know it now, but he told me what a thrill I had given him in the Escobar fight. So I consider my greatest defeat was a victory after all. In America I could fight my hardest, meet my greatest defeat, but retain my old friends, who apparently loved me as much when I was down as when I was up. To find out about the people living on this continent was a great triumph for me.

II

Perhaps the grandest thing about this America of yours is that everyone stands on his own two feet, that he is accepted as a man. In Europe one's individuality is obscured by one's occupation. In Norway, for instance, a blacksmith is always a blacksmith, or as in my case, always a prizefighter. It was in the United States that I put on my first tuxedo, and when I go to a party in this country nobody wants to know how I earn a living, but just whether I am a good fellow.

In Norway, as in many other countries, one must always state one's "occupation" when registering at a hotel. Here, as long as you pay your bill, your occupation is your own affair. Once on a return visit to Norway, I was asked, as usual, to write down my occupation. This made me angry all of a sudden. I took the pen and wrote down in the appropriate place the mysterious initials "B.V.D." [an American brand of underwear] and explained to the puzzled clerk that this was an American occupational abbreviation.

In Europe, if you are introduced to someone, the first question is, "What is your occupation?" In North America, I am just "Mr. Sanstol," and what I do is my own business unless there is some special reason for discussing it. I have discovered that the first of the American ten commandments is, "Mind your own business."

In fact, when I first came to America nobody asked whether I was rich or poor, educated or illiterate. All they asked was: "Can this Palooka fight?" When they found I could, they gave me all the credit I deserved - and more. At home the fact that I was once a fighter means I could never be a gentleman. Here I am accepted as a gentleman unless or until I prove myself otherwise. The only thing I must do is to make myself useful. In other words, I have a chance.

And that brings me to the great thing about America which you Americans are now beginning either to doubt or to forget. To the immigrant - and here I include myself - the United States is still the land of opportunity. It is a place where everybody has a chance to make good.

It has been said many, many times that America worships the almighty dollar. Naturally, this has its bad side. But there is something to be said for dollar worship. It does give an incentive for the immigrant who feels that he can come here and by hard work, self-denial, thrift, can accumulate enough dollars to give him self-respect, to enable him to go back to Norway proud to show an American dollar in his purse, and to educate his children and to prepare them for a social and cultural status which they could never have hoped to achieve in the old country. Another thing, even though the immigrant may never learn to speak English well, or to acquire the social graces, he knows that if he can make good as a money-getter, he will win the respect of the people about him. The American community always delights to honor the man who can make money. Every immigrant has a feeling that maybe he can be another Carnegie.

And while I definitely want to avoid giving advice to the United States, as so many Europeans like to do, I have an idea that you are getting the wrong slant on immigration. It may be necessary, during the present economic crisis, to restrict the influx from abroad when there are not enough jobs for those already here. But it is the immigrant who has opened up your great northwestern plains, built your subways, and made your steel, to say nothing of mining your coal. It is this labor of people who knew they had to make good and were willing to work with an intense concentration on the job, which is the basis of your wealth. The native American tends, more or less, to despise manual labor and to live softly.

This is the American way as I see it. The immigrants come, with nothing but their strong right arms and the will to succeed. They are not afraid to do the hard work, the dirty work. They fill the mines and mills. They cultivate the arid plains and endure the long loneliness of the fishing fleets. They form the necessary substratum of the population in an economic sense. But they intend that their children shall rise a step above them, go to college, become teachers, political leaders, doctors and lawyers, artists; and then in turn, new waves of immigration, driven out perhaps by convulsions in the heart of Europe, replace the passing generation of foreign-born laborers.

Do not forget that it has been estimated that for every able-bodied worker who comes here, two or three persons are given employment in providing for his wants. A static population means a static economy. The old American stock is not reproducing itself, but the sons of the immigrants and their sons are being assimilated. And do not worry about being overcrowded. The theories of Malthus are as dead as the old man himself. There is not the slightest doubt that, with intensive cultivation and intelligent control of distribution, this country could support a population of 300,000,000, just as well as it does 130,000,000. [*As of today, some 90 years later, the U.S. population is well over 300,000,000!*] And if the present population wanted to do so, I am told, they could all be supported comfortably in the state of Texas.

But I am getting a little too deep into economic theory. I merely want to express my very strong feeling that America is the land of opportunity, and that in giving a chance to the industrious, ambitious immigrant it is creating the nation of the future.

III

I want to impress upon you that we who come from Europe believe that the United States, in an economic sense, is still the land of opportunity. People say the United States hasn't a frontier any more. Maybe this is so in a purely geographical way. You haven't those undeveloped territories. But there is still a frontier of the mind. There is so much still ahead of you. You are not satisfied with your very high standard of living. You intend to be even more comfortable, to be better housed and to get around even faster than you do now. The American who has a new invention will be encouraged to perfect it, can get capital to develop it - God knows there is no lack of capital in the United States - and if the idea is good enough and big enough, he has a chance to get rich.

Do not forget that only a European can truly appreciate America. Despite all surface problems, he knows it is still the land of opportunity and the land of plenty. I often think of the Polish welterweight I knew who was asked to enlist in the U.S. Army. He hardly knew what it was all about, but off he went with the recruiting officer. He was given a bed and a bath, and then in the morning - bread and butter for breakfast! Said he: "This is the country for me!" For there are millions of Europeans who never see white bread and butter on their tables.

Perhaps this little anecdote means nothing to you well-nourished Americans. Indeed, I fear that only a European really can appreciate it.

I have a suggestion to make to the young Americans who leave school or college discontented with their lot, criticizing their own country, grumbling about the lack of opportunity. Let them go to Europe and try to earn their own living for a year or two, living on what they earn. They will be only too glad to return home.

Of course, every European is asked what he thinks about American women. We are always surprised at the way they are treated in the United States. I remember my amazement at the way American men jumped up when a woman rose, when I was on my first voyage to the United States. I asked an American why they did this. He said it was a persistence of the frontier attitude, of the time when women were a precious minority. True, there is not much gallantry in New York subways, but New York is not America.

As for the American women themselves - if I only dared to write what I think about you! You are, above all, a funny combination of a true friend and a real woman - all at the same time. I can never get wise to you; I realize, however, that you have conquered me by your frankness and understanding. You American women are so different from those I knew in Europe. I cannot figure you out. I am puzzled, and my ideas about you are changing every day, which probably is the only explanation why I am still single. Once I fell in love with a lovely American girl, but she did not like my work. I loved her so much that I finally made up my mind to get myself another job. One day I told her I had been to see a doctor who was going to practice plastic surgery on my battered nose. She looked at me a little surprised and said, "Please, Pete, don't let him touch your nose, that is what is cute about you."

I have said something about New York not being America. New York was the city I first came to, and in the gymnasiums there I picked up the New York slang which I took to be standard English. But the minute I got away from New York to Washington, Boston, the Middle West, California, I found out that I was using almost a foreign tongue. My "New Yorkese" was resented - or corrected; it was something that people throughout the country just did not think American. It was "New York."

New York is not so much an American city as a link with Europe. It is cosmopolitan, filled with hundreds of thousands of people speaking Italian, Yiddish, German, Spanish, Polish, or what have you. The foreigner who comes to New York and stays there too long runs a good risk of never really becoming an American.

And yet New York never ceases to thrill me. Maybe it isn't the United States, but the United States without New York isn't the United States. In this city I myself may be nobody, but I feel important because I am at the center of things. This isn't just a city, it is a metropolis, yes, a megalopolis. In it I feel the heartbeat of this mighty country. Here America's activities are concentrated. Here has been built America's crowning material achievement. Here the ablest come to find the fullest play for their talents, the greatest rewards of their efforts. The solid human masses in the crowded streets and subways push on relentlessly to their mysterious destinations. On your sidewalks people are smarter, brisker than elsewhere, and it seems to me, somewhat darker of the complexion, sharper voiced. The concentration of wealth in the downtown skyscraper district is oppressive; the glitter of the midtown avenues dazzles the stranger. And yet everywhere dirt and noise appal. Visitors from the rest of the country travel long distances just to "see New York" as the greatest show the land affords. The city itself is the New York World's Fair's greatest rival. All businesses, organizations, causes must have their headquarters here; and here both good and evil seem to be exaggerated because of the large scale of everything done in New York. New York has all the dominating quality of old world capitals, but with the verve of the brisk new world; and the life in its streets and buildings moves at a faster tempo than in any other city in the world.

IV

I said at the beginning that I don't intend to criticize, but I would like to make one or two very mild suggestions.

May I suggest that there are two American exports to Europe that should be put under some sort of embargo? The American tourist abroad is largely responsible for European lack of respect for the United States. This tourist - conspicuously in Paris - removed from the restraints and responsibilities of home, forgets his manners, his dignity, sometimes even the ordinary decencies. He is bad advertising for the United States.

So are the widely circulated "gangster" films that make us think of Chicago as a weird city where "killers" roam the "loop" district beneath the elevated railroad structure, with machine guns spilling death from "dark green sedans," and where gangster duels always end unhappily for the "innocent bystander." We know all too much about your Dillingers and your Dutch Schultzes. We have to visit America to come to know that it is on the whole a land of decent, home-loving, God-fearing folk.

And then there is one other thing. I often wish you had a different national anthem - or even a different attitude toward the one you have. I have been so deeply impressed by the way an English or Canadian audience rises and sings "God Save the King" at the end of a theatrical performance or at a banquet. The song comes from the heart. One need not be an Englishman to share the thrill. When you Americans sing the "Star Spangled Banner," you rise dutifully and respectfully, but the song does not come from the heart. People will join in the first few lines of the song; then they stumble over the first high notes and quite forget the meaningless words. There is no patriotic thrill. I do wish that you had a simple, soul-stirring national hymn that you could know by heart and sing from the heart.

I have noticed a rather strange sense of inferiority; whether it is a result of modesty or of national youthfulness I cannot say. There is the undue respect paid to European lecturers and other personalities. You fail to realize the extent to which you have been going ahead culturally. I have been able to notice this change even in my short lifetime. When I lived in Norway I would read in the papers about some American educator or social worker coming to study what was being done in the Scandinavian countries. Today the same news columns tell of European educators going to study educational techniques in the United States, of European scientists visiting American research laboratories, of European social workers all admiration over slum-clearing projects in La Guardia's New York. They all return home with the same story of how far the United States is ahead of the rest of the world. I do not believe that you Americans realize this; in fact, as a nation you do not realize that you are grown up.

And as for your future. I am just an ex-prize fighter, not a scholar. But I have the feeling that in the United States we see the next great World Empire. The British Empire seems to be cracking up. The ancient empires, so I have read, were doomed because they were built on a basis of slavery. The United States is a nation of free men - despite some dreadful injustices and oppressions. And it will not be an empire under arms. For empire building by force brings united resistance. The next great empire will not be a German empire. For Germany wears blinders. It can see only in one direction and does not know what is going on at one side or the other. No narrowly nationalistic nation can become a great world empire. America has everything, wealth, brains and ambition. It is collecting the talents of a score of races as oppression sweeps Europe and Asia. Whatever happens in Europe, the future is America's.

The End