

[return to don parsons homepage](#)

The Time They Remember the Forgotten Man

Nick Poulos – The Chicago Tribune

With the deadline fast approaching for the American taxpayer to file his annual income tax return, we are reminded of William Graham Sumner's thoughts on the "Forgotten Man". Sumner, a Yale University professor, delivered his classic lecture on the subject in 1883. Here are some excerpts from that talk.

The Forgotten Man is the man who never is thought of.

He is the honest laborer, ready to earn his living by productive work. We pass him by because he is independent, self-supporting, and asks no favors. He does not appeal to the emotions or excite the sentiments.

He is the clean, quiet, virtuous, domestic citizen who pays his debts and his taxes and is never heard of out of his little circle. He only wants to make a contract and fulfill it, with respect on both sides and favor on neither side.

We do not remember him because he makes no clamor; but I appeal to you whether he is not the man who ought to be remembered first of all, and whether, on any sound social theory, we ought not to protect him against the burdens of the good-for-nothings.

Wealth comes only from production, and all that the wrangling grabbers, loafers, and jobbers get to deal with comes from somebody's toil and sacrifice.

Hard at work

Who, then, is he who provides it all? Go and find him and you will have once more before you the Forgotten Man.

You will find him hard at work because he has a great many to support.

The Forgotten Man is delving away in patient industry, supporting his family, paying his taxes, casting his vote, supporting the church and the school, reading his newspaper, and cheering for the politician of his admiration. But he is the only one for whom there is no provision in the great scramble and the big divide.

Such is the Forgotten Man. He works, he votes, generally he prays - but he always pays — yes, above all, he pays.

He does not want an office; his name never gets into the newspaper except when he gets married or dies. He keeps production going on. He contributes to the strength of political parties. He is flattered before election. He is strongly patriotic. He is wanted whenever, in his little circle, there is work to be done or counsel given.

He is a commonplace man. He gives no trouble. He excites no admiration. He is not in any way a hero, nor a problem, nor notorious, nor an object of sentiment, nor a burden, nor an object for charitable aid and protection, nor one over whom sentimental economists and statesmen can parade their fine sentiments.

Society's substance

It is plain enough that the Forgotten Man is the very life and substance of society. He is the one who ought to be first and always remembered. He is always forgotten by sentimentalists, philanthropists, reformers, enthusiasts, and every description of speculator in sociology, political economy, or political science.

If it is desired to bring about social improvements, bring us a scheme for relieving the Forgotten Man of some of his' burdens.

The Forgotten Man is weighted down with the cost and burden of the schemes for making everybody happy, with the cost of public beneficence, with the support of all the loafers, with the loss of all the economic quackery, with the cost of all jobs.

Let us remember him a little while. Let us take some of the burdens off him. Let us turn our pity on him instead of the good-for-nothing. It will be only justice 'to him, and society will greatly gain by it.

[Return to don parsons homepage](#)