

A Summary of
The United States at the End of the 20th Century : A Historical Framework
by Professor Lynn Dumenil and Professor Norman Cohen
(Occidental College)
delivered on October 16, 1997

By drawing a comparison between the end of the 19th century and that of the 20th century, Professor Dumenil and Professor Cohen not only presented thoughtprovoking analyses of the social, political, and cultural conditions of the United States but also suggested the general directions that U.S. Might take in the coming century.

Professor Dumenil opened this joint lecture by describing the social implications of the World Columbian Exposition held in Chicago in 1893. She pointed out that the American society at the end of the previous century was also marked, in spite of the superficial optimism symbolized by the Exposition, with the ambiguous sentiment of anxiety just as our century is today.

Professor Cohen then described several major changes in the economic framework that the American society went through in the twentieth century. He held that the basic foundation shifted from "Capital and Labor" base to "Knowledge and Skill" base in this century. He made a critical remark that this shift in economic structure might alienate the unskilled workers and the undereducated people thereby creating more economic and industrial problems.

Professor Dumenil also sketched some historical shifts seen in American consumer culture. She underlined the ironical situation of contemporary American society where leisure-centered culture intensified the nature of work rather than freeing people from the burden of work.

Both Professor Cohen and Professor Dumenil concluded the lecture by describ-

ing several contemporary social issues regarding multi-culturalism such as affirmative actions and O.J.Simpson trial. Both of them suggested that African-American community no longer hold a unified leader as they once did in the 1960s, and the various minority movements came to be rather segmented these days leaving a number of old issues unsolved.

The lecture was quite well received by the participants and the discussion concerning multi-culturalism and Nativism followed.

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