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C. Bertrand Thompson: A Remarkable Man

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C. Bertrand Thompson: A Remarkable Man
Daniel A. Wren, Julia A. Teahen, Regina A. Greenwood, and Arthur G. Bedeian

What we knew...

- Scientific Management Bibliographer
- Disciple of Frederick W. Taylor

What we discovered through an
incredible adventure...

A quick web search turned into inquiry, series of e-mail messages, ancestral research, travel, archival research, meetings of management history experts, and a paper.

www.uuworld.org/2004/01/lookingback.html

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looking back

UUWORLD

Famous consultant and forgotten minister

by John Buehrens

Clarence Bertrand Thompson (1882 – 1969) was a person of outstanding accomplishments, but as a Unitarian minister—one of a mere handful of mixed racial heritage in the denomination a century ago—he is virtually unknown among us today.

His mother, Medora Reed, was the daughter of a slave who escaped with her to Boston. (The father was the slave owner.) Clarence's father, James Beauregard Thompson, was born free, served in the Union Navy, became a jeweler, and joined the Boston black community's elite Essex Club. Reed and Thompson married in 1868, moved to Denver—where Clarence was born—in 1880, and when their marriage ended, Medora moved to Los Angeles with her son in 1890.

Clarence finished high school at 15 and earned a law degree from the University of Southern California at 18. Drawn to The Fellowship, an independent liberal congregation in Los Angeles, he was chosen its assistant minister in 1905. Urged to obtain a Harvard degree, he enrolled there in 1906, earning a B.A. in one year, an M.A. in sociology and economics in another.

During those two years Thompson also served as minister of the Unitarian Church of Peabody, Massachusetts, and was in fellowship with the American Unitarian Association. Evidently he had not discussed his racial heritage. When he became engaged to writer-lecturer Maravene Kennedy, reports that he was "crossing the color line" made the Boston press. It was also news to Kennedy, who married him nonetheless.

Soon Thompson noticed that some of his parishioners were turning to other clergy for their weddings and funerals. When he asked the church board to pass a resolution about this disregard for his ministerial prerogatives, they declined. He submitted his resignation. When it was refused, he stayed on a year, finishing his book *The Churches and the Wage Earners*, which challenged churches to overcome class prejudices and to devote half of their pulpit time to social issues. His own sermons were published weekly in the *Salem Evening News*. For a time, he worked unloading trucks to experience the laboring life himself.

But when he left the pulpit in 1908, he disappeared from Unitarian history. I learned about him by chance from Dr. Lawrence Howard of Pittsburgh, a retired professor of management who is African American.

Rejecting socialism as based in class hatred, Thompson joined Edward Filene, a pioneer in using worker input in management decisions, at the Boston Chamber of Commerce. There he encountered the management theories of Frederick Winslow Taylor.

Appointed lecturer on manufacturing at Harvard's new Business School in 1910, Thompson became an exponent of "Taylorism," but he challenged Taylor's elitism in his 1914 book *Scientific Management*. He turned down a full professorship at Harvard in 1916 and became

Family Legend & Missing Links

- Thompson family believed that they were descendants of Jerome Bonaparte (Anita Reynolds)
- What happened to his first wife, Maravene Kennedy Thompson?

C.B. Thompson (1882 - 1969)

C.B. Thompson
1916 Passport Photo

- Authored 6 books on sociology, economics, and management
- Published more than 50 articles in the same and in chemistry
- Lawyer, minister, professor, consultant, engineer, lecturer, researcher, and biochemist

Thompson's Family Tree

Early Years

- Graduated from High School in 1897 (Age 15)
- Graduated from Los Angeles Law School at the age of 18 (California required a lawyer to be 21)
- First Publication in 1906 in law publication
- Met Maravene Kennedy and moved to Boston
- Ordained and Pastor of the First Unitarian Church of Peabody, Massachusetts in 1906
- Graduated from Harvard University (economics and sociology) in 1908

Ministry

- Lectures and sermons merged economics and religion
- Rapid delivery - 200 word per minute
- Optimistic
- Attracted large audiences, even for evening lectures
- Married Maravene Kennedy on February 6, 1907 - rumors around the marriage
- Resigned his ministry on May 11, 1908

First book - 1909

- The Churches and the Wage Earners
- Summarized his concerns with religion's role relative to work, economic activity, and industrial workplace.
- Labor, management, ownership, social class and status, and equality addressed similarly to lectures and sermons
- "...I was rather more interested in real business than in the theory about it." (1933)

The Harvard Lectures

- Interest in Taylor's "task management system"
- Early Work
 - Harvard Business School - Lecturer in Manufacturing - coordinated guest lecturers by early management pioneers
 - Published and Apprentice of the theory and practice of the "Taylor System"
- Taylor was "openly skeptical" about whether his system could be taught in the classroom; but gave two lectures; then returned the payment (1909)
- Principles of Scientific Management published in 1911

Thompson meets Gilbreth

- Taylor allowed Thompson to apprentice at the Plimpton Press; which was being reorganized by Hathaway and Cooke
- Gilbreth was conducting time studies and complained that the studies were going slowly

Thompson & Gilbreths

- Thompson suggested that Gilbreth “place a clock with a large dial and the hands running in hundreds of a minute and place it in the midst of the group...taking pictures of the whole set-up.”
- Gilbreth later claimed use of the clock as his own idea

Thompson & Barth

- Taylor asked Thompson to reorganize the Gray & Davis Company
- Thompson felt he lacked mechanical engineering skills and asked Barth to help
- Barth agreed if Thompson accepted Barth's son, Christian, as head of the Planning Department.
- After Taylor's death, Christian was fired
- Barth told Thompson he would make it impossible to work in the Taylor System in the US

Thompson's How-To Articles

- Developed a step-by-step means of implementing the Taylor System
- Plan the work to be performed so it can be sent to the correct work station
- Train the best workers in “elementary time study”
- Provide opportunity for workers to be observed by an experienced time-study expert to verify skill achievement
- Secondary motion analysis, workplace tools, & worker fatigue

Thompson & Taylor Correspondence

- British Reaction to Taylor System - lack of employee involvement
- Taylor's criticisms of Thompson's work
- Later praise for Thompson's work

It

February 25th, 1915.

Mr. C. Bertrand Thompson,
Cambridge, Mass.

My dear Mr. Thompson:

Thanks for your letter of Feb. 23rd enclosing editorial from the Boston Herald. Considering the fact that this paper has almost universally been against us in its editorials I think your article has done admirable service.

Yesterday I received a letter from Senator Saulsbury - a democrat - of Delaware. He tells me that his sympathies are entirely against legislation adverse to Scientific Management and that he hopes that our propaganda will be successful in preventing the later leaders from passing their bill.

I am glad to hear that your Swedish work has materialized. I have just written another letter to them.

Copy of your last article on Scientific Management was forwarded to me two or three days ago and I expect to read it through with the greatest interest.

I am going to lecture in Cleveland next week - Peiss has arranged for it - and I expect a fine audience there.

This is my first time away from Mrs. Taylor since early in December.

Very sincerely yours,

ROUTED BY W. T.
BUT NOT RECORDED

“Impure Taylorite”

- Morris Cooke criticized Thompson for not quoting him in an article and giving too much praise to Gantt
- Gilbreth refused to share his list of clients with Thompson
- “...some people who formerly used to be my friends have made a systematic attempt to get all jobs away from me whenever they can” (1916)
- Gilbreths were the only pioneer writers not included in Thompson’s 1914 book about the Taylor System

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The application must be in duplicate and accompanied by three unmounted photographs of the applicant, not larger than three by three inches in size, one of which is to be affixed to the passport by the Department; the other two must be attached to this application and its duplicate, respectively. The photographs must be on this paper and should have a light background. The one on the left of the application should be signed by the applicant across its face, so as not to obscure the features.

See this sheet used to complete and fill. The last line of one column, a receipt or other record, and a certificate for application. A woman's application must also include data in column 10, and a receipt record must state whether or not she is a native citizen. The name should be recorded and once entering the application in the column of each, Bureau of Citizenship, Washington, D. C.

(Form No. 101)
(FORM FOR NATIVE CITIZEN.)

UNITED STATES OF AMERICA.

STATE OF _____
COUNTY OF _____
I, Chateau Thompson, a NATIVE AND LOYAL CITIZEN OF THE UNITED STATES, hereby apply to the Department of State, at Washington, for a passport.

I solemnly swear that I was born at Kenner in the State of Colorado, on or about the 12th day of April, 1887; that my father, James Beaumont Tomlinson, was born in Maryland; that he emigrated to the United States from the port of _____

on or about _____; that he resided _____ years, uninterruptedly, in the United States, from _____ to _____ at _____; that he was naturalized as a citizen of the United States before the _____ Court of _____ at _____

on _____, I, _____, as shown by the accompanying Certificate of Naturalization; that I am domiciled in the United States, my permanent residence being at Boston in the State of Massachusetts, where I follow the occupation of Country Engineer; that I am about to go abroad temporarily; and I intend to return to the United States within _____ with the purpose of residing and performing the duties of citizenship therein; and that I desire a passport for me in visiting the countries hereinafter named for the following purpose:

Philippines in route to Manila
Commercial Business
I intend to leave the United States from the port of San Francisco sailing on board the Shingo Maru on September 23, 1916

OATH OF ALLEGIANCE.
Further, I do solemnly swear that I will support and defend the Constitution of the United States against all enemies, foreign and domestic; that I will bear true faith and allegiance to the same; and that I take this obligation freely, without any mental reservation or purpose of evasion. So help me God.

Sworn to before me this 29 day of July, 1916
at San Francisco

Clerk of the _____ Court at _____

* A person born in the United States in a place where births are recorded must submit a birth certificate with his application.
† If the applicant's father was born in this country, there should be drawn through the blank in brackets.

International Management Consultant

- Pacific Commercial Company's Calamba Sugar Plantation - Phillippines (1916)
- Henry Le Chatelier asked Thompson to assist Louis Loucheur in applying scientific management

The Great War 1914-1918

- Thompson was appointed to the French Munitions Ministry to improve quality and increase production in the shell loading factories
- Paul Planus assisted
- Taylor-Thompson System

“...scientific management is not a universal solution, a panacea for all the ills of humanity... [and] needed the participation and knowledge of the worker.”

--Thompson (1920)

“Best Known Consultant in France”

- Compagnie General Electrique de Nancy
 - Worked with the union for their acceptance of reorganization using scientific management
- Planus was among the first consultants who worked with Thompson - Munitions Ministry weapons factory at Saint-Etienne
- French Eastern Railway Company
- Michelin
- Thibaud-Gibbs & Cie - Parisian department store
- La Samaritaine

“If you want to be a consultant, only
believe half of what you see and not
a word of what you are told.”

--Thompson to Planus

“Scientific organization requires not only time and money. It can be implemented only if we show unlimited patience, perseverance, and above all, loyalty and justice...[and] if one is determined to share the gains with the workers.”
--Thompson (1929)

Taylor-Thompson System Consultants

- Paul Planus
 - Left Thompson's firm in 1929 to start his own business
 - Was the most successful firm of its type in France
- Suzanne Garcin-Guynet
 - Collaboration with HEC in annual conferences intended for female employees in industry
 - Pioneer of consulting in France
 - Prepared French women for business careers

Thompson's Reflections

- Consulting success result of cooperation with organized labor
- France - Some consultants were "shamless fakers..."
- England - Could not recognize the Taylor System
- Germany - Prohibited bonus payments for time study
- Italy - "rarely goes beyond paper stage"
- Belgium - textile industry
- Poland - Karol Adamiecki was not widely accessible
- Russia - "Stakhanovism" - daily output 15 times normal production

Late Career

- Traveled with his second wife, Lisbeth Heineman
- Volunteered services to the French Air Ministry but left in frustration during World War II
- Researched biochemistry for two years at UC-Berkley - forced retirement at age 65
- Moved to Uruguay and studies use of arginase as a treatment for cancer - "Colaborador Honorario" at Policlinique University
- Died in Uruguay on January 12, 1969

Interests

- Read literature, philosophy, and history
- Fine book collection numbered in the thousands of volumes
- Friends of Nabokov and his wife
- Pianist

Legacy

- “...he was an ideal teacher - he gave his associates the direction to develop lucid, experienced, and imaginative management.”
- “...could speak more interestingly and knowledgeably on virtually any subject.”
- “...a renaissance man.”

Legacy

- His work evolved beyond the technical to focus on labor and management
- Taylor-Thompson system reflected his concept of humanism
- Reshaped Taylor's ideas into a cross-cultural context

He would best be remembered...

"Among my 'deepest satisfactions,' ...the opportunity to satisfy a wide-ranging curiosity of study, experience, and travel; the feeling of constructive achievement in the reform of important business affairs and the consequent amelioration in the well-being of their employees; the stimulation of younger minds in business and scientific research; the possibility of seeing at first hand some of the world's finest art and hearing the best music, drama and ballet in their most perfect interpretations; and finally in the conviction that life is all-pervading and everlasting and that our little individual shares in it are not entirely without significance."

--Thompson (1958)

Questions?