

## Modern History Sourcebook: Tahâ Hussein: from *The Future of Culture in Egypt*, 1954

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In order to become equal partners in civilization with the Europeans, we must literally and forthrightly do everything that they do; we must share with them the present civilization, with all its pleasant and unpleasant sides, and not content ourselves with words or mere gestures. ...For our national defense we need a strong army, one equal in men and equipment to that of any potential aggressor. Our forces must be organized on the European pattern, particularly with respect to the training of soldiers, officers, and the various categories of specialists. I think all Egyptians would agree with this...We want to be like the European nations in military power in order to repel the attack of any aggressor and to be able to say to our English friends: "Thank you, you may go; for we can now defend the Canal." Who wants the end must want the means; who wants power must want the elements constituting it; who wants a strong European-type army must want European training.

We also need economic independence. No one doubts or disputes this. Indeed, we clamor for it and importune the government to do whatever it can as quickly as possible. We want this independence not for its own sake, but for the protection of our wealth and resources. I do not mean we should be independent of the Hejaz, Yemen, Syria, and Iraq, but independent of Europe and America. We must therefore use the same means that the Europeans and Americans use to defend their national economies. This would entail, among other things, the building of schools to train our youth for this purpose. Again, who wants the end must want the means. It is not enough, not is it logical, for us to seek independence while we behave like slaves.

Further, we want scientific, artistic, and literary independence so that we may be equals, not slaves of the Europeans in these aspects of life too. Desiring this intellectual and concomitant psychological independence, we naturally must want the means, namely, studying, feeling, judging, working, and organizing our lives the way they do.

We want, finally, to be free in our country, free from both foreign pressure and domestic inequity and oppression. The former requires strength, the latter democracy. If we aim at these ends we must adopt the means to acquire them. These are the means by which the European and American countries acquired their independence and their democratic government. Now that we have succeeded in restoring the honor and self-respect that come with independence, it is our plain duty to protect what we have won. We must rear a generation of Egyptian youth who will never know the humiliation and shame that was the lot of their fathers. Some Egyptians object to Europeanization on the grounds that it threatens our national personality and glorious heritage. I do not naturally advocate rejection of the past or loss of identity in the Europeans; ...the only time that we might have been absorbed by Europe was when we were extremely weak,

ignorant, and possessed of the notion that the hat was superior to the turban and the fez because it always covered a more distinguished head!...Although great powers imposed their will on us for many centuries, they were unable to destroy our personality. I am merely asking that the preservatives of defense, religion, language, art, and history be strengthened by the adoption of Western techniques and ideas.

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