

A nation lacking in humility

Joe Ferullo | Sep. 15, 2009 NCR Today

A great look at the society-we-are by David Brooks in Tuesday's [New York Times](#). [1] Brooks uses some old radio broadcasts on the day victory was declared in World War Two to contrast where American society was then and where it has gone now.

The radio broadcasts by big-name celebrities of the era were striking for their humility, Brooks writes. There was no chest-thumping, no high-fives -- but a quiet recognition that an awful chapter in human history had finally come to a close.

He contrasts that with what was to follow: a social change that decried humility and promoted, well, self-promotion -- a spirit, Brooks says, that carries through right up to Sunday's MTV Video Music Awards, where Kanye West felt perfectly fine interrupting Taylor Swift's award and bringing the attention back on himself.

Brooks is right, but he may be a half-step behind this time. Certainly, Wall Street has not learned a lesson in humility: as soon as they bounced back from the brink, they paid off government loans and started handing out large bonuses with no sense of embarrassment. One guesses it will take new federal laws (and not just the President's scolding on Monday), to change that.

But a comeback for quieter things may indeed be one fallout of economic hard times for society-at-large. By all current accounts, the recession looks not to be as horrible as it could have been -- but most Americans seem to understand a big bullet was dodged, for many just barely. That sense may shape life for a while.

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