*The Unknown Citizen*

[W. H. Auden](https://poets.org/poet/w-h-auden) (1907 – 1973)

*(To JS/07 M 378  
This Marble Monument  
Is Erected by the State)*

He was found by the Bureau of Statistics to be  
One against whom there was no official complaint,  
And all the reports on his conduct agree  
That, in the modern sense of an old-fashioned word, he was a saint,  
For in everything he did he served the Greater Community.  
Except for the War till the day he retired  
He worked in a factory and never got fired,  
But satisfied his employers, Fudge Motors Inc.  
Yet he wasn't a scab or odd in his views,  
For his Union reports that he paid his dues,  
(Our report on his Union shows it was sound)  
And our Social Psychology workers found  
That he was popular with his mates and liked a drink.  
The Press are convinced that he bought a paper every day  
And that his reactions to advertisements were normal in every way.  
Policies taken out in his name prove that he was fully insured,  
And his Health-card shows he was once in hospital but left it cured.  
Both Producers Research and High-Grade Living declare  
He was fully sensible to the advantages of the Instalment Plan  
And had everything necessary to the Modern Man,  
A phonograph, a radio, a car and a frigidaire.  
Our researchers into Public Opinion are content  
That he held the proper opinions for the time of year;  
When there was peace, he was for peace: when there was war, he went.  
He was married and added five children to the population,  
Which our Eugenist says was the right number for a parent of his generation.  
And our teachers report that he never interfered with their education.  
Was he free? Was he happy? The question is absurd:  
Had anything been wrong, we should certainly have heard.

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1. Read the three line epitaph at the beginning of the poem as carefully as you read what follows. How does the epitaph help establish the voice by which the rest of the poem is spoken?
2. Who is speaking?
3. What ironic discrepancies do you find between the speaker’s attitude towards the subject and that of the poet himself? By what is the poet’s attitude made clear?
4. In the phrase “ The Unknown Soldier” (of which “The Unknown Citizen” reminds us), what does the word “unknown” mean? What does it mean in the title of Auden’s poem?
5. What tendencies in our civilization does Auden satirize?
6. Who would you expect the speaker to define a Modern Man, if a CD player, a radio, a car, and a refrigerator are “everything” a Modern Man needs?