

CHAPTER I

Differences

The Essential Difference

EUROPEANS AND AMERICANS do not refer to the essential difference by name, but we know it is there in the form of continental contrasts. Americans wonder why European governments have so much more patriarchal authority over matters which in America are private responsibilities. Why, they ask, do Europeans trust government to satisfy private desires better than private citizens? It seems to many Americans that many Europeans have traded a portion of their liberty for economic security, and are willing to give up some of their personal freedom in exchange for stability.

This perception draws attention to a striking distinction in how Europeans and Americans generally view the purpose of government. Americans of all political persuasions are committed to individual freedom, and believe it is the government's responsibility to protect the freedom of the individual, not to limit that freedom. Vehement and sometimes strident political debates take place between Americans on all kinds of subjects, from taxes and regulation to the proper obligations of the state versus those of the individual. But in spite of strongly held differences of opinion most Americans consider too much government unhealthy, and many believe that Europe has too much of it.

Whenever Americans and Europeans do discuss the essential differ-

ence, which is not often, they point out that it runs throughout the histories of Europe and America, but that it is easier to explain as it concerns the New World. What they mean is that America, in its youth, is still very much aware of the principle on which it was founded. In fact, as Europeans often comment, Americans talk about the principle all the time. They call it freedom, and independence; and some Europeans call it a history of winning. From the ground up Americans celebrate it with a birthday party every year on the fourth of July, and they express their appreciation for it each year on a national day of thanksgiving.

In the Old World, however, no celebration is held in honor of a European principle; indeed, if there were such a principle what could it be? Some Europeans caution that the explanation of the essential difference, from the continental perspective, is not so straightforward, because their history is one of losing.¹ It takes much longer to tell, because Europe is a tree with many branches that has been growing for more than twenty centuries.

From the Top Down

What marks American and European history appears in stark relief. America was built by European immigrants, and their descendants, who eschewed social, political, and economic practices they resented. Their purpose was to form their own government themselves, from the ground up. Europe, on the contrary, was built by Europeans who enjoyed social, political and economic privilege, and who had a great deal to gain from participating in government rule from the top down.

This explanation, however, makes little sense without reference to two subjects seldom mentioned when Europeans and Americans are together. The first is *the role of aristocratic rule in Europe*—that is to say, rule provided by Europe's royal houses and the nobility. The second is *the practice of patronage*—that is to say, the financial and political support given to all manner of cultural, educational, and social undertakings by the ruling and noble classes. Today these two subjects do not receive much attention. But they merit a great deal, especially when Americans and Europeans

begin their periodic hand-wringing as they criticize each other's attitudes and behavior.

It is impossible to understand Europe and the Europeans without knowing how Europeans see themselves and their rights and responsibilities in their respective countries. Over centuries the role played by Europe's aristocracy and the practice of patronage established a hierarchy of governance and also contributed to a regimented class structure. To this day the exercise of rule from the top down remains largely unchanged, and much of Europe's class structure remains intact as well.

Americans, by comparison, have never had an aristocracy. There are, of course, some Americans who boast of having aristocratic European friends with titles like Baron or Count; although on that subject European "social climbers" follow the same practice. In this regard we are very much alike. But the point is that America has never been ruled by a class born to nobility. Americans have been governed by their own elected officials; in other words, by themselves, which is why Americans have never enjoyed patronage of the European variety. On the contrary, Americans have a history of giving, not receiving, a history of charity and volunteering, a history of social mobility and job mobility, a history of idealism, hope and openness, a history of individualism and toughness in order to survive, and a history of solving problems privately rather than turning to government.²



The history of European rule has produced dependence by the ruled on those who govern. It is true that by the end of the eighteenth century, marked by the French Revolution, much of the absolute power of the old aristocracies had slipped from their grasp; and a little more than a century later, by the end of World War I, the power held by the Austro-Hungarian, German, and Russian monarchies had disappeared too. But during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, as the authority of aristocratic royal houses was gradually replaced by that of political parties voted into office by the citizenry, the practice of rule from the top down nonetheless remained.

Today rule from the top down is exercised by what should properly be described as *the new aristocrats*. They are the current government elite, in the form of large cadres of civil servants, functionaries, government officials, and members of parliaments and national assemblies. Their influence is well illustrated by their numbers; for example, in Sweden one in three is employed by government, and in France it is one in four. Common to both the old and the new aristocrats is their impact on economic, political, and social life. Whether it is called big government or the welfare state the guiding principle of politics in contemporary Europe is rule by an elite.

This is not to say that there is no difference between governance by European royal houses in the eighteenth century and democratic government in Europe in the twenty-first. To cite the most glaring contrast, Europe's kings and queens ruled by divine right, while contemporary Europe is governed by elected leaders. There are, indeed, conspicuous differences in practice, but not in the basic relationship of dependency of the ruled on the rulers. One can properly emphasize that European voters elect their leaders, but once elected responsibility for the design and rationale for public policies is the closely held private preserve of the new aristocrats.

This practice, as it were, is exactly the opposite from that in America, where electorates continually challenge whether government policies serve the interests of the citizenry. American voters decide who will govern, monitor the performance and judge the effects of public policies on a continual basis, in every conceivable non-governmental forum. The implicit faith of Europeans in the ability of government to alleviate the miseries of the human condition is absent in America, and very much present is the conviction that strength is found in individual responsibility. This one difference gives an order of substance and meaning to our respective cultures. Nothing remains untouched.

Aristocrats, Old and New

The telling distinction between Europe and America appears in how Americans and Europeans view freedom and individual responsibility,

and in how they define the proper role of the state. In America probably no one, in recent times, has cast the distinction more dramatically than an American president whose ancestors came from Ireland. To paraphrase from John Fitzgerald Kennedy's inaugural address in 1961, American social, political and economic culture prompts Americans to ask "What can we do for our country?"—whereas European social, political and economic culture prompts Europeans to ask, "What can our government do for us?" Although President Kennedy did not refer to the essential difference by name, its existence is reflected in the questions. From both can be drawn numerous comparisons between how Europeans and Americans conduct their private, public and professional relationships.

This is not to conclude that Americans love freedom more than Europeans do, or that all Europeans merrily follow government pied pipers. The disagreements Europeans have among themselves, about social, political, and economic issues, as well as the fervor of their disputes with each other, belie such an interpretation. Discovery of a fly in the soup is a daily event, but seldom is fault found with the soup itself, made, flavored and served by the new aristocrats.

Europeans and Americans, however, while they use the same words, do not always mean the same things. This applies to Europeans' attitudes toward freedom. They do not love it any less, but many conceive of it in a different way. This explains why Americans who have never studied aristocratic rule and the practice of patronage are often mystified by European attitudes toward authority. The history of both is closely linked. Although the governing role played by the aristocracy is well treated by historians, much less has been written about the equally influential role of patronage.



Europe's rulers—that is to say, those who controlled wealth via the ownership of land and the collection of taxes, whether it was the aristocracy of princes, dukes, counts and barons, or the church—practiced patronage in every corner of society, and most notably in the humanities, arts, and sciences. In eighteenth-century Europe the Germans called this principle of rule *Mäzenatentum*. It is an old word which can be translated as patron-

age, and which might be replaced today with the German word *Kulturstaat*, which means literally, “state culture.” Either way, the effect in the twenty-first century is remarkably similar to the result in the eighteenth. The state provides the financial base for all kinds of cultural, educational and social activities, rather than private individuals and foundations.

This applies to Europe generally, although in the case of England and Scotland the practice of rule has evolved differently. It is true that the experience of the English and the Scots has no counterpart in the rest of Europe. As my English colleagues point out to me, aristocratic rule, beginning with the Magna Carta in 1215 and followed by the Declaration of Arbroath in 1320,³ gradually became subject to significant legal limitations. Further, they rightly emphasize that it was English common law, not Roman law, that was brought to America, along with the name of its most famous city—first called New Amsterdam by the Dutch in 1624 and renamed New York when the English captured it in 1664.

For continental Europeans the English case warrants a separate discussion, one which is tangential to the subject addressed in this book. There are, today, many Europeans on all sides of the political spectrum who consider the United Kingdom to be America’s Trojan Horse in Europe, some of whom knowingly cite the remark attributed to George Bernard Shaw that America and Britain are two nations “divided by a common language.” Indeed, the principle of rule discussed here developed differently in England than it did in continental Europe. But lest there be any mistake about it, the English have just as royal a history and just as rich a patronage as the continental Europeans. Rule from the top down was no more foreign to Britain than it was to the continent.



This conclusion should not be construed as a dismissive response to the legitimate complaint that it is irresponsible to lump differing national histories into an amorphous concept of “Europe.” The purpose here is simply to emphasize that patronage in Europe, including England and Scotland, was part of control and influence from the top down.

There are countless examples. One of the most impressive—because the practice has lasted so long and continues to this day—was the birth

and development of Europe's great universities. It began with the University of Bologna in Italy in 1088. It is the oldest in Europe and boasts such alumni as St. Thomas Aquinas, Dante and Petrarch. Bologna was followed during the next 300 years by, among others, Paris, Salamanca, Cambridge, Oxford, Prague, Florence, Krakow, and Cologne in 1388. They all had wealthy, and in most cases royal and aristocratic patrons, whose financial and political support underwrote the development of higher learning. One result was the emergence of what we call the humanities and sciences. But individual explorers, artists, architects, writers, and scientists were the beneficiaries also.

There are hundreds of them, such as the explorers Columbus, Vespucci, Magellan, da Gama and Drake. Artists like Titian, Michelangelo, Rembrandt, Dürer, Vermeer, David or Rubens. Philosophers and writers like Kant, Voltaire, Racine, Molière, Cervantes, Chaucer, Dante, Shakespeare, Goethe and Schiller. Composers like Mozart, Chopin, Bach, Puccini, Debussy, and Beethoven. And of course scientists, such as Galileo, Leonardo da Vinci, Newton, Lavoisier, Linnaeus, and von Humboldt.

Most of the extraordinary examples of architecture in Europe are the fruits of patronage. The beauty of European buildings and the grandeur of continental monuments are less a symbol of openness and magnanimity than they are of aristocracy, nobility, and authority. Consider St. Paul's Cathedral or Buckingham Palace in London, or the cathedral (*il Duomo*) in Milan on which both Leonardo and Bramante worked; the Florentine Cathedral Santa Maria del Fiore with its magnificent cupola designed by Filippo Brunelleschi; St. Peter's Basilica in Rome built by Lorenzo Bernini and the Sistine Chapel as well as the Sforza Chapel with paintings of Michelangelo, Botticelli and Perugino. Without the patronage of great noble families—such as the Medici, the Borghese and the Corsini in Italy—none of these magnificent creations would exist. Patrons determined, to a large extent, which artists and artisans survived and which disappeared from view.⁴

Although the examples just cited are Italian, Italy was not an exception. French art and architecture are equally well-known, symbolized by the museum of the Louvre, Les Invalides, and the Château de Versailles. There are an equal number of noteworthy examples in Germany, such as

the baroque palace of Würzburg built by the Schönborn family and the parks and palaces of Potsdam outside Berlin, where the most famous one has a French name, Sans Souci, and was built by the Hohenzollern, a family which still exists in Europe. And there is the classical city of Weimar, built by German dukes, where Goethe, Herder and Schiller lived.

It is impossible to know what they all would have achieved without patrons; but patronage accounted for much of the history of Western civilization. Munificent patronage not only enhanced the influence and prestige of those who provided it, but also built an extraordinarily rich European culture which had been in full bloom for centuries before the American idea of freedom was put into words in 1776, just a little more than 230 years ago.

A principal consequence was creation of a well-educated European class that became an intellectual elite, very much aware of the world beyond the borders of their own countries. Alongside this group, of course, existed another level of Europeans, poor in wealth and education, and largely ignorant of the world beyond their own villages, towns and cities. Of the countless millions of this class thousands risked the perils of the trip across the Atlantic; those who made it laid the foundations of modern America.

Patronage also provided, in a sense, a long-term and presumably unintended legacy. Little by little the beneficiaries became dependent on their patrons. As long as patronage continued, and was conducted on a broad scale and in an enlightened manner, there seemed to be no reason to take issue with why it was provided, or to condemn those providing it. Nor did it appear worthwhile to challenge whether, as a matter of principle, it was a wise thing to do, or if in fact, it might be producing an unanticipated consequence—namely, turning the beneficiaries into permanent wards of the patron. But the result was that patronage in the humanities, arts and the sciences eventually became a state responsibility, and part of an overall system of rule and control.



The practice worked well, until the end of the eighteenth century. The French revolution, and later political upheavals throughout Europe in the

nineteenth and twentieth centuries, destroyed, for all practical purposes, most of the political and financial power of Europe's nobility. The decline was long and slow, and also, some would argue, inexorable. The aristocracy—and, of course, the Church, in which members of aristocratic families played major roles—lost most of its land, much of its income, and major influence. With that loss the form of patronage as practiced by Europe's noble and privileged classes for more than eight hundred years vanished. But as the exercise of power and influence acquired new names and shapes, the entrenched principle of rule from the top down remained intact.

Following the French Revolution the royal courts of kings and queens were transformed, one by one, into nation-states with presidents and prime ministers, and with parliaments, legislatures, and national assemblies. That is to say, the patrons themselves, once individuals, were replaced by institutions of the state during the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, created by those who controlled government. Public monies, whose source was taxes, were substituted for private wealth, no longer available on the same scale. Rule from the top down was now exercised by those elected officials who controlled the expenditure of tax monies, and no longer by members of royal families and aristocrats. Creation of the nineteenth-century state was seen as a liberating moment. The state, created to protect the people, would become the antidote to the rule of nobility and to the tyranny of princes. What changed in reality, however, was not the practice, but the names of the rulers and the patrons.

The effects were the same. The largesse of patronage engendered dependency on the patron, whether it was an private individual, a government employee, or the state itself. Comparisons are found everywhere today, and one of the most startling, from an American perspective, is the relationship between universities and their graduates.

Europe, as America, has great universities, but on the continent few of them are private and almost none have alumni associations. In the view of most Europeans and their political leaders there has never been a need for private universities, since those governing have always funded them. As a result graduates of European universities do not assume a debt of gratitude for their education, and in fact few make financial contributions

to their respective alma maters. “Why,” a European might ask, “should I make a gift to the state for providing me the education to which I am entitled?”

The contrast with the practice on the other side of the Atlantic is sharply drawn. Americans had no choice but to create private colleges and universities. They did it independently of government, because the government was not there to do it for them. They built their system of higher learning themselves, with their own effort and with their own money. In doing so, they cultivated a tradition not only of excellence—Harvard, for example, was founded in 1636 and Stanford University as recently as 1885—but unlike the Europeans they also introduced the practice of supporting their college or university long after they had finished their education. In fact, hundreds of thousands of graduates of American colleges and universities make financial gifts to their alma maters every year, and many do so throughout their lives. And even though Americans later developed great public universities as well, all of them, both public and private, rely for financial strength to a significant degree on alumni who want to “give something back.” It is an original American concept that does not have a Europe counterpart.⁵

The foregoing description should not be interpreted as either condemnation or praise. It merely illustrates why many Europeans do not look to themselves, but to the top and hence to government, to rule, to decide, to control, to determine, to underwrite, to patronize. Patronage, of the ancient or of the modern variety, is part of Europe’s culture, and European culture is a product of European history. Europe’s history makes Europeans who they are. Or, to put it in a deliberately provocative way, Europe’s culture of authority is what remains after Europeans have forgotten the historical details of the development of their civilization.

An example of this approach is to contrast the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT), founded privately in 1859 in Cambridge, with the European Union’s intention, announced in February 2005, to create a European Institute of Technology to rival MIT in innovation and initiative. A second, French example, illustrates the same approach. In the summer of 2006 the president of France announced the government’s intention to finance creation of an Internet search engine, called Quaero, to rival Google.⁶



In the twenty-first century patronage is no longer called *Mäzenatentum*, and the word *Kulturstaat* is not used frequently, either. There really is not a specific name for it today, but patronage is provided by every government in Europe, in the form of subsidies and grants for all manner of endeavor. The beneficiaries are not only the arts, humanities and the sciences. They are also government employees who enjoy pension plans more generous than those available in the private sector, families who receive mandated child support subsidies, and government employees who receive year-end salary bonuses. The result is that the state is both a popular provider, and a generous employer which, unlike a private business, can spend more money than it takes in, without declaring bankruptcy.

The visible hand of the state touches business competition and labor markets, medicine and health care, law and justice, agriculture and the environment, communication and transportation, information and the media, housing and urban development, social security, child care and retirement pensions, and state monopolies for electric power and gas. In short, every aspect of artistic, cultural, economic, intellectual, political, and social life in twenty-first century Europe is affected, in one way or another, by the financial generosity of the state.

The state—in other words, the politicians and civil servants who operate it—determines what serves the public and the private good. Needless to say, not all Europeans applaud this practice because some believe that the extensive powers of government limit individual freedom and stifle personal initiative. In fact, the late Austrian economist Friedrich A. Hayek published a book about it in 1944, entitled *The Road To Serfdom*. He did not refer to the new aristocrats, but that is whom he was writing about. Although the book has been translated into a number of languages, it never captured the continental imagination; and received little attention in 1944–1945 when distraught Europeans were blaming capitalism and free markets for the violence of Nazi Germany and its effort to impose its own brand of serfdom on the continent.

Whichever way one looks at it, however, there is little public discussion about what should be considered acceptable obligations of government versus the right of individual responsibility. On this issue few European

politicians encourage national dialogue because the utility of their monopoly of political and economic power might be called into question. If that Pandora's Box were opened, it would be difficult to close. What does take place are demonstrations and strikes about how much vacation time there should be, how early one can retire, how much funding the state should give to pensions, how long the state should provide unemployment payments, and how much money should be paid in subsidies to businesses. The arguments are seldom about *whether* the government should be involved with these matters, nor are they about the right of the individual to work as long as he wishes, or to fund his own private retirement program, or about his right to take less rather than more vacation.

In Europe there are few private entities with sufficient financial means to initiate and sustain national debates on the principle of more government versus less government. Indeed, the "think tank," privately funded and directed, is the exception. In America it is the rule, where different philosophies of public policy are discussed in think tanks large and small, and where ideas compete with each other every day in the intellectual arenas of American colleges and universities.



Irrespective of how one may judge the relative merits of the comparison, there is little dispute about the result. Over time, the Europeans have become, almost without recognizing it, economically dependent on the state, sometimes described, euphemistically, as *the public sector*. Many, though by no means all Europeans, complain about it, but few seek to change it because the alternative of being without it is even less appealing. Thus, today rule and patronage are managed by "the new aristocrats." If you will, *the power of government obligates*. Over two centuries ago both were managed by "the old aristocrats"—and the consequence was the same, rule from the top down. *The power of nobility obligated*, and the French nobility had a phrase for it, *noblesse oblige*.

The juxtaposition of *the state* versus *the individual*, of *the public* versus *the private*, has more than just philosophical meaning, because the distinctions between public and private responsibilities in America and Europe

affect how Europeans and Americans see themselves, and define who they are. Lest there be a misunderstanding the contrast is drawn to explain why Europeans and Americans often see things differently. Does the difference mean that Europeans consider the power of *the public sector* to be in conflict with freedom? Most would disagree. It would be an error to conclude that they do not care deeply about their individual freedom. But they do not think it is threatened by rule from the top down. They view the state as the protector and the banker of their entitlements, such as the right to work less but to be paid as though they were working more, or the right to retire earlier rather than later, with the same benefits.

This is why since 1945, with the dramatic exception of Margaret Thatcher in England, no European leader has successfully dismantled the public sector, privatized government services, broken up state monopolies, reduced regulation, and decreased taxes. Europeans are, for the most part, loyal to the unwritten concept of rule from top down. This loyalty affects, in turn, their concept of freedom. They describe it as something in which they believe, not as an inalienable right, but as a government responsibility and not an individual one, to be managed and protected by the state. On the other hand their judgment of freedom in America is less clear. Some Europeans admire it and value it as Americans do. But many argue that Americans have too much of it, practice freedom as a free-for-all, exercise it without responsibility, use it to justify survival of the fittest, exaggerate its advantages, and employ it as though freedom were the cardinal rule governing the game of life. These Europeans have learned it is more comfortable to live within the prescribed limits of their freedom rather than to use freedom to challenge those limits.

The result, for many Europeans, is ambivalence about where their loyalties lie. They find themselves looking at a paradox. If they support political leaders who wish to weaken the power of the new aristocrats, and therefore reduce entitlements, they will bite the hand that feeds them, and most Europeans will not do that; economists call it self-interest. Yet if they remain loyal to the state, they also remain dependent on the state's financial largesse. Some European leaders—most notably in France and Germany—proudly describe the result as *the European socio-economic model*.⁷

Many Europeans thus struggle with a dual loyalty—to the largesse of the state, and to their individual liberty. Because their governments take so much in taxes, it is difficult to accumulate wealth, and economic freedom eludes them. That explains why tax fraud is so widespread in Europe. Europeans have developed black markets for goods, labor and services to avoid paying high value-added taxes which generate enormous revenues for the state. Tax avoidance, if not a matter of pride, is a matter of course—in Germany, ironically, tax evasion is sometimes described as a *Kavaliersdelikt*, which is a historical reference to a misdemeanor to be ignored because aristocrats were not held accountable for minor offenses. This practice puts Europeans in the position of applauding the largesse of the state on the one hand and trying to defraud it on the other.



Americans tend to associate freedom with loyalty to America, while most Europeans do not see a connection between freedom and loyalty to Europe. Some Europeans would say that this may change in the future, as the European Union (EU) grows together in power and expands in influence. Indeed, there may well be a day when Europeans consider Europe to have concrete, definable, patriotic meaning rather than just being a geographical term. But, for the time being, few Europeans define their nationality as European, nor are they heard singing “God Bless Europe.”

Europeans are loyal to their respective countries, but they do not generally express it the way Americans do; although that can differ significantly. For example, it is with real conviction that the English sing “God Save the Queen” and with genuine pride that the French say “Vive la France.” But the Germans do not say “God Bless Germany.” Nor do Austrians have a song called “God Bless Austria,” even though the famous American film *The Sound of Music* would suggest that Austrians do. The film has a romantic message for many American viewers who think that the song “Edelweiss” is the Austrian national anthem. In fact, it was written in 1959 specifically for the Broadway musical. For Austrians, however, the story is a chilling reminder of a tragic side of Austrian history.

To make the difference even clearer, Americans often say and sing, “God Bless America.” They bless their country because it is theirs, even

though the image of the home of the brave and the land of the free is sometimes tarnished. They take great pride in the American flag. This is not to say that Europeans are not proud, too, or that they do not show their flags. Europeans take immense pride in their respective cultures because they represent an old and rich heritage. Cultural nationalism is alive and well in European countries, but political nationalism as Americans express it, with what sometimes seems to Europeans as endless emphasis on the value of freedom, does not exist. In January 2005 President Bush used the words “freedom” and “liberty” in his inauguration speech forty-one times in the space of about seventeen minutes. There is no equivalent European usage.

Nor are there many Europeans who understand how Americans interpret the symbolism of their flag, including those who know America reasonably well. One of them, Parisian writer and philosopher Bernard-Henri Lévy, published an article in the *Atlantic Monthly* in May 2005, entitled “In the Footsteps of Tocqueville.” It was the first of several commissioned by the magazine to celebrate the bicentennial of the birth of the Frenchman who wrote *Democracy In America*. Lévy’s introduction begins with observations on “A People and Its Flag” from which the following excerpt is taken:

It’s a little strange, this obsession with the flag. It’s incomprehensible for someone who comes from a country where the flag has, so to speak, disappeared, where any nostalgia and concern for it is a sign of an attachment to the past that has become almost ridiculous.

. . . Or is it something else entirely? An older, more conflicted relationship of America with itself and with its national existence? A difficulty in being a nation, more severe than in the flagless countries of old Europe, that produces this compensatory effect?

Few Americans would draw, much less understand Lévy’s interpretation of the flag’s meaning. For Americans the flag is important precisely because “it is a sign of attachment to the past.” It symbolizes freedom won in the American Revolution, but it also stands for freedom nurtured in the present, and to be defended in the future.

It is our histories that present the context and provide the perspective with which Americans and Europeans see the world, whether it concerns the importance of a flag or a description of who really won America's liberty in 1776. "Don't ever forget," a German friend reminded me in Berlin in the spring of 2002 when we were discussing differences between Americans and Europeans, "that the American Revolution was a war fought by freedom-loving Europeans against high taxes imposed by a German king sitting on an English throne." When I later recounted this story to a businessman who had emigrated to America from Italy shortly after the end of World War II, he gave me an annoyed look and said, simply, "It was freedom-loving Americans who fought the American Revolution, not the other way around."



It may seem strange to Americans, generally unfamiliar with the history and practice of continental politics, that European socialists deny that freely elected European governments rule from the top down and argue, on the contrary, that it is precisely the injustices of privilege found in rule from the top down that socialism wants to remove. There is, however, a specific European hook in the argument that is applied by both socialists and nonsocialists alike.

Socialists refer to the injustices of privilege as "the evils of capitalism" as practiced in America. Opponents of socialism, predictably, argue that they want to limit the arbitrary rule of socialists who seek to impose from the top down their view of justice and equity at the expense of individual liberty. Both socialists and many nonsocialists, however, with a novel twist of inventive logic, assert that *the American model*, without giving it precise definition, is inappropriate for Europe. What they recognize, but do not say, is that *the American model* is freedom built from the ground up, and it is that model which represents a threat to those who rule from the top down, whether they are of the left, of the center, or of the right.

The issue is a straightforward one. What this comparison highlights is that America and Americans have, indeed, followed a different path. Although the conclusion may be obvious, it should not be taken for granted, nor should its significance be underestimated. What concerns the new

aristocrats is that they alone wield the power of the state, an approach for which some Europeans have a specific name. They refer to it as modern-day enlightened despotism whose motto is “everything for the people but without the people.”⁸ The new aristocrats, however, dress up this reality linguistically, and rename rule from the top down *the European socio-economic model*. They then place it in a favorable democratic light by contrasting it with *the American model*, which by inference, is callous, manipulative, and unjust. Thus, when Europeans, but also some Americans, wish to draw a negative comparison between America and Europe they focus their criticism on the imperfect *American economic model* as a dream without a future.⁹

They do not argue the merits and consequences of *the essential difference*, they ignore the existence of the new aristocrats, and in the case of socialist and former French prime minister, Lionel Jospin, they invent the theorem to fit the theory. Jospin did exactly this in his book entitled *The World as I See It*, published in French in October 2005, as he proudly described his discovery of “a new aristocracy,” and defined it as follows, according to one French reviewer.

. . . an implicit alliance between major corporate leaders, the world of finance, entrenched interest groups in industry and the public sector, high-ranking federal civil servants, and privileged individuals from the media. . . this group [the new aristocrats] demands that other social groups make sacrifices in the name of global competition or [in the name] of economic stability, but is unwilling to even consider making an effort or sacrifices itself.¹⁰

From the Bottom Up

An accurate description of American life is almost always surprising to Europeans, and they often doubt what they are told. From the continental perspective America was born yesterday. This judgment accounts for what many Europeans view as erratic, free-wheeling, and over-zealous behavior, which they criticize, dismiss or forgive as a characteristic of immaturity. But there is another, more significant side to America’s birth which many

Europeans do not see, or perhaps ignore. Whichever is the case, there is much about American behavior that Europeans cannot explain accurately and it begins with how America was built.

The American difference is not caused by the oceanic divide, but by her youth, a nation forged not so long ago by men and women of mixed backgrounds with varied skills. Grassroots Americans formed their communities and shaped their society themselves. They established their institutions in the same way. They were, by choice and heritage, democratic and not aristocratic. The right to govern was not vested in a king, but rested with Americans who created a “government of the people, by the people, for the people.”

This phrase is not a trivial description. The principle it contains is not only a part of the political air Americans breathe, but it also underscores a telling historical fact with a European connection. Of the authors of the Constitution one was named James Wilson. He was born in Scotland in 1742 and came to America in 1765. His confidence in the idea of popular sovereignty led to the substitution of “We the people of the United States . . .” for “We the people and the states . . .” in the Constitution’s Preamble.¹¹ In its consequence it was a decision which continues to represent a key element of the essential difference between America and Europe.

In 1787 the framers of the Constitution took great pains to define the relationship of the individual to the state, and created a Bill of Rights to codify it. They forbade the government, and the states, from granting titles of nobility, and also wrote into the Constitution that “no person holding any office or profit or trust under them [the government], shall, without the consent of the Congress, accept any present, emolument, office, or title, of any kind whatever, from any king, prince, or foreign state.” Indeed, George Washington rejected the idea that he be given the title of “King” with the unforgettable explanation that he hadn’t fought George III in order to become George I.

The absence of an American aristocracy has a number of subtle effects which are commonplace in daily American life, but which are noticed much less often in Europe. One of them is that class distinctions generally make Americans nervous, as for example, in the relationship between a

master and his servants. This unease has a public side as well. Being waited on often makes Americans feel uncomfortable. It is hardly a coincidence that in American restaurants waiters arrive at the table, introduce themselves by their first names and do not call themselves waiters or waitresses: “Hi, my name’s Steve. I’m your server this evening.” A waiter in a Viennese restaurant, on the other hand, does not arrive at a table and say, “Hi, my name’s Heinrich.”

Unlike Europeans, Americans tend to minimize formality and understate its usefulness. The result is that they normally behave as though social differences are unimportant and class differences do not exist. Americans, whether they know each other well or not, usually call each other by their first names. Europeans, on the other hand, consider that an invasion of privacy. They believe their first name belongs to them, and that no one else has the right to use it without their permission.



Europeans do not practice the kind of easy and relaxed camaraderie between social classes that exists in America. No country in Europe comes even close to the mixed-salad relationships Americans have created, which is a reflection of the continuing and largely successful efforts to break down racial barriers. Indeed, there are Europeans who remain highly critical of America’s social and racial problems, as though they had none themselves. But in fact they do. Europeans are divided into highly stratified social classes, and national and ethnic groups. There is little intermingling of either classes or races, although there are, for example, almost twenty million Muslims living in Europe. This is one of the striking, but seldom discussed differences between Europe and America; namely, the absence in Europe of any significant debate on such matters as affirmative action. Ask the English how tolerant they are of nonwhites, or ask the Germans if they really are fond of the Turks, or ask the French whether they would like to welcome more Muslims and Jews into France—a country which already has the largest Muslim and Jewish populations in Europe. Americans do not ask these questions, of course, and the Europeans seldom discuss them.

Another comparison, with a different consequence, relates to patrons.

Patrons have always existed in America, but the practice of patronage has been and is of a private and voluntary nature. Government largesse has not been doled out by aristocratic rulers, noblemen, civil servants and politicians to create and preserve a so-called American culture of rule from the top down. America has never had old aristocrats or new ones. It does have a meritocracy of wealth and social position, with great differences between the very rich and the very poor; a divide which is found in every society on the planet. What distinguishes America from Europe is that the social and economic ladder is climbed on the basis of merit. That is truer today in America than it has ever been.¹² There exists the hope and the dream that the poor can become rich, with hard work and a little luck, because they are part of rule from the bottom up. The hope and the dream, however, are elusive in a system of rule where there exists a hierarchy of authority and a culture of class.

Despite occasional assertions to the contrary, there still exists in Europe a powerful class structure of many levels which is experienced by anyone who lives and works in Europe; for example, the political elite, the educated elite, the intellectual elite, the labor union class, the business class, and also the factory workers, the assembly line employees, the seamstresses, and the farmers. These groupings exist in America, too. But there is a difference. Americans believe that respect can be earned, that you are judged on what you achieve, not on what social class you come from. This confidence in merit breaks down social barriers and promotes social mobility in all kinds of ways. It is, in fact, something peculiar to America which Europeans often notice and speak about when they visit the New World.

What is remarkable, from a European's viewpoint, is that America's social system is so pliable. It has within it the capacity to change, to overcome old prejudices, and to address the possible. America is the story of the self-made man. Anybody can operate a business. Anybody can succeed. Anybody can earn respect. Anybody can send their children to college. Anybody can be president, which in fact, is what former president Bill Clinton said he wanted to be when he was growing up.

Indeed, the so-called anybodies can and do become president. Since World War II America's presidents have included a former clothing sales-

man, Harry Truman, a former peanut farmer, Jimmy Carter, and a former actor, Ronald Reagan. Europe does not know this kind of mobility, and European leaders do not have this kind of background, because continental standards, expectations, and experiences make it practically impossible. Neither do many Europeans have great respect for this mobility. It suffices to recall the ridicule heaped on Ronald Reagan for being a former “actor” when he was first elected in 1980, a common European bias which was repeated when former actor Arnold Schwarzenegger was first elected governor of California in 2003.

This latter illustration is especially ironic because Schwarzenegger is an Austrian who emigrated to America and became a naturalized citizen. Austrians are both envious and proud of him, a former movie actor married to a relative of John F. Kennedy. But Europeans looked on both men with condescension, because neither of them were perfected political products of rule from the top down. They both emerged from the bottom and moved upward, and one of them, Ronald Reagan, led the Europeans out of Cold War bondage. Who in Europe, in 1989–1990, would ever have thought that one day the former prime minister of Great Britain, Margaret Thatcher, and the former general secretary of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union, Mikhail Gorbachev, would be sitting next to each other in Washington Cathedral, to attend the funeral of former actor Ronald Reagan in 2004, or that Gorbachev, when he paid his final homage to the deceased president in California, would reach out and gently touch his coffin?



The qualities of American leaders are reflective of how Americans have built their country, and of how they are still shaping it. Class structures do not prevent a successful businessperson, for example, from becoming an admired donor to charitable causes in education, medicine, the arts, or the sciences. Americans who create foundations and give to charities are honoring the freedom of opportunity that allowed them to make enough money to help others. An American can earn respect in this way, and thereby change his or her social status in the community as well as help build the community itself. They are contributing to causes that define

what America is. It is part of the ongoing construction of America, and cuts across ethnic divisions. It is an American habit of life.

Europeans, in contrast, are very aware of the social class into which they have been born, and find it much more difficult to move from one to another, to break down the barriers with which their history has endowed them. In Europe “getting rich” brings more economic freedom, as it does in America, but honoring the freedom of opportunity that makes wealth possible is not considered an obligation of being wealthy. Helping others less fortunate is the responsibility of the state, which explains why there are so few private foundations in Europe. Moreover, it is counter to the purpose of the professional political class to weaken the state’s benevolent monopoly by encouraging philanthropy. And for those Europeans who do appreciate the practice of financial giving in America and who wish to establish a foundation, legal barriers and obstacles await them at every turn, with the exception of Britain.

It is true that American society consists of the very rich, those of a middle income, and the very poor, but Americans have not yet accepted the proposition that it is the government’s responsibility to equalize differences in income. The whole idea of rule from the bottom up is freedom of opportunity and freedom of choice, the possibility that anyone can become a successful part of the American dream, which Europeans, who profit from rule from the top down, derisively describe as *the American model*. It is the search for the American dream that brings about 1.5 million immigrants each year to America, coming from, among other places, Europe. For them *the American model* means the opportunity to succeed. One hundred years ago an Englishman described America as “an oyster which the individual can open with many kinds of knives.”¹³ Immigrants to America today believe the description still applies, to which the presence of thousands of young Europeans in California’s Silicon Valley attests. To this day migration to America is a one-way street. It does not take place in the opposite direction.

The Essential Difference, Again

For both Europeans and Americans there is, on the one hand, Europe. It is the Old World; namely, the European continent from which came men

and women of different nationalities and religions to settle in America. There is also, on the other hand, America, which takes its name from a European explorer. It is the New World, where European immigrants built a nation of united states. When Europeans and Americans speak of Europe and America in one phrase, it is a reference to a history that spans more than five centuries. But it is the essential difference with which we can decipher the enigma of our exceedingly complex relationship.

Some Americans, of course, are very conscious of this, and recognize that Europeans and Americans have known each other especially well since the eighteenth century, when life in Europe was defined as an age of enlightenment and reason, and life in America was still one of discovery, not yet defined. Since Benjamin Franklin's first visit to Paris in 1767, just nine years before the American Revolution, the European character and the American spirit have been entwined, one with the other. That spirit and character are an inseparable part of the European-American relationship. It is one that is historically, uncommonly close. No other relationship like it exists anywhere in the world.

One of the reasons, of singular importance to the nature of the relationship, is found in the heritage of western civilization. It is faith in what Austrian economist Friedrich Hayek recited as "those values on which European civilization was built;" namely, "the sacredness of truth . . . the ordinary rules of moral decency . . . a common belief in the value of human freedom . . . an affirmative action towards democracy. . . . opposition to all forms of totalitarianism." These values have been called "the principal ingredients of classical liberalism," but in fact, they are also the principles of civility and liberty. The allegiance to these ingredients of Western civilization, and to their defense when threatened, are part of the substance of the European-American experience.

A history of trial and tribulation characterizes this relationship. It is one that has never been dull, that has often been difficult, and that has proved uniquely rewarding. In spite of ourselves and more often because of ourselves, the discord caused by our cultural, political, and economic quarrels is much less significant than the strength provided by the values we have in common. Hayek called them European. But they are also the values that European emigrants brought to the New World, and put at the heart of their resolve to build a new life.



What binds these values together is the thread of Christian heritage. In the Old World “no one,” wrote the religion editor for *Newsweek*, “can visit the medieval core of any European city without encountering evidence of the Christian humanism that gives Europe its enduring cultural identity.”¹⁴ In the New World this thread became what medievalist William Carroll Bark described with the phrase “the Christian ethic,” a thread peculiar to America which ties American lives together.

What is meant is respect for the unique nature and intrinsic worth of every, single individual. It was the belief that individual liberty embraces respect for the dignity of man and for the dignity of his labor. It was the conviction that each individual is important, that each individual matters, that each individual counts. It was an equality which is the exact opposite of what Europeans mean when they speak of social equality guaranteed by the state. It was an ethic which provided Americans with the strength and confidence to build America from the bottom up.

Expression of the idea did not just appear once, in America’s Declaration of Independence in 1776. It has been repeated with conviction on countless occasions, including in Abraham Lincoln’s Gettysburg Address of 1863, and in the Liberty Oath of 1950, signed by seventeen million Americans. That oath, together with a full-scale replica of the Liberty Bell, was presented by General Lucius Clay as a gift from the American people to the people of West Berlin in 1950, following the end of the Berlin blockade in 1949. Thereafter, as the West Berliners struggled as an island of freedom in the middle of a red communist sea, the first line of that oath was read on the radio every Sunday morning just before noon, and is still read on *DeutschlandRadio* today: “I believe in the sacredness and dignity of the individual. I believe that all men derive the right to freedom equally from God. I pledge to resist aggression and tyranny wherever they may appear on earth.”¹⁵



It can be persuasively argued that the influence of Christianity on European life began to wane significantly in the latter half of the twentieth

century. Today, in Western Europe, only in Italy, Ireland, Portugal and Spain do more than a third of the population go to church on a monthly basis—in France an estimated 5 percent of Catholics attend church—and many Europeans on the left of the political spectrum associate religion with “political reaction.”¹⁶ It is true that a decline has taken place in America as well, but it has been to a much lesser degree, as the idea of ‘the Christian ethic’—no matter how it is defined, explained or phrased—continues to leave its indelible mark on American life.

From the idea came a fabric made not of self-righteousness, but of the principles of freedom and individual liberty. And even though the fabric was woven long ago, it is still very much intact. Part of it is made of the wisdom found in the Ten Commandments, even though today it is illegal to post them in public school classrooms. Although few Americans would refer to strength, justice, prudence, and temperance as “the Cardinal virtues,” these too make up part of the fabric. And part of it is a commitment to love, hope, faith and charity, symbolized in America by the phrase “In God We Trust.” In the first decade of the third millennium “In God We Trust” is written on all American paper currency, and on every American coin.

The phrase itself did not appear on American paper currency until 1957. But the words are the modern reflection of trust in the old idea of the Christian ethic. Europe’s emigrants were looking for a new order of the ages that would include freedom of worship, political independence, and economic opportunity. They did not find the new order waiting for them. They created it, and reaped what they sowed. They were free to give thanks, as they chose, for a bountiful harvest. And when they began doing so in 1621, they called it giving thanks. More than 150 years later, in 1777, the Continental Congress declared the first national Thanksgiving, and 86 years after that, in 1863, Abraham Lincoln proclaimed the last Thursday in November national Thanksgiving Day.¹⁷ Whether described as a giving of thanks, or as a prayer, that national day celebrated confidence in strength, justice, prudence and temperance, and in the conviction *that all men derive the right to freedom equally from God.*

Today Europeans are generally unaware that Thanksgiving is one of America’s most important holidays together with Christmas and Easter,

nor are they aware that separation of Church and State was conceived as an affirmation of freedom of religion rather than condemnation of the Christian ethic. America's immigrants insisted on a clear distinction because they believed that the State should not dictate an established national church of worship. The reason to separate the Church from the State was to establish freedom for religion, not freedom from religion. At the end of the eighteenth century Americans wrote into their Constitution that Congress shall make no law prohibiting the free exercise of religion. But the Founders of the American republic—which included Episcopalians, Lutherans, Methodists, Quakers, Presbyterians, Deists, and Roman Catholics—also embraced the idea of “the Christian ethic” in their New World as part and parcel of civility and liberty. On Christmas Day 1789, to be sure, the new American Congress was in working session and not on vacation. Eighty-one years later however, in 1870, Congress declared the day of the birth of Jesus Christ to be a national holiday in America.



Throughout all their toils Americans sought to make “the principal ingredients of classical liberalism” a part of their daily lives. They did so consciously, not only with confidence in faith and reason, but also with the hope inherent in their vision of a new order of the ages. They did not always succeed, to which the extended American history of slavery is agonizing testimony, as is also the struggle for the right to vote. The American struggle for freedom would be marred by racial discrimination. But as Americans in the New World they moved continually forward, one slow and often painful step at a time, to create an American age of enlightenment, guided by idealism, and by a belief in hard work that became part of the American spirit. Their effort was far from perfect and the New World they created was not, either. But it was far, far better than the Old World they had left behind, a world in which, long before, the concept and practice of slavery had been adopted and a world in which racism would have catastrophic consequences in the twentieth century.

Those who came to America from Europe, with some inevitable and also notable exceptions, were not the Europeans of wealth and privilege.

Early immigrants—sometimes described today as “the sweepings of Europe”—sought a refuge from territorial wars, ethnic prejudice, and religious bigotry and persecution; nineteenth-century immigrants sought to escape poverty and famine. They were looking for equality of opportunity and equality under the law as signposts on the road to the pursuit of individual happiness. In the eighteenth century Americans already considered it important enough to declare all three inalienable rights in their Declaration of Independence in 1776. They all suffered the emotional pain of leaving Europe and members of their wider families, the dangers of storm and illness while crossing an endless ocean, and the hardships of starting a new life in an unknown world. But once there, they persevered. They gave their spirit, their conviction, their hearts, and their lives.

What European emigrants to America wanted to create was defined, deliberately, when the Great Seal of the United States was designed in 1782 by Benjamin Franklin, John Adams, and Thomas Jefferson. On it are written two inscriptions, both in Latin. The first, *Novus Ordo Seclorum*, is translated as “A New Order of the Ages.” In seeking a new order, in a new world, Europe’s emigrants looked to Divine Providence during the creation of the republic for which they stood. Hence, the presence of the second Latin inscription, *Annuit Coeptis*. In English it means “He (God) has favored our undertakings.” And to one of the authors of the Constitution, James Madison, it meant the following,

We have staked the whole future of American civilization, not upon the power of government, far from it. We have staked the future of all our political institutions upon the capacity of mankind for self government; upon the capacity of each and all of us to govern ourselves, to control ourselves, to sustain ourselves according to the Ten Commandments of God.

The enterprise became a republic, a state in which government is carried on from the bottom to the top, nominally and in fact by the people through their directly elected representatives. To describe it a Greek word was chosen, *demokratia*, and less than a century later the republic was christened by Alexis de Tocqueville, an aristocratic visitor from Europe,

in a famous book he called *Democracy in America*. Of the Americans he wrote, “they brought with them into the New World a form of Christianity which I cannot better describe than by styling it a democratic and republican religion. . . . [F]rom the beginning, politics and religion contracted an alliance which has never been dissolved. . . . [The Americans] combine the notions of Christianity and of liberty so intimately in their minds that it is impossible to make them conceive the one without the other.” For millions of Americans this continues to be the case, and for millions of Europeans the fabric of the American character remains a mystery.¹⁸

If Tocqueville had also written of the Europeans, the description would have been a fundamental contrast in how Europeans and Americans view the purpose of government and the origin of government authority. Europeans considered legitimate authority as coming from God to the Sovereign, who then delegated authority to his officials, to thus rule the citizenry. Americans viewed legitimate authority as coming from God to the citizenry, who then redelegate authority to government officials, who governed as servants of those who elected them.

This was a simple distinction, profound in its consequence. It described American and European behavior better than any other explanation, and affected the structure and hierarchy of all of our respective relationships, private and public. In twenty-first century America and Europe this continues to be the case—and it applies to everything we undertake, whether it is business, education, or government.



Americans, unlike Europeans, think in terms of ongoing change, rather than in terms of historical periods and distinctions. While many signs of European heritage are present throughout America, the cultural and ethnic influences which define American society today are broad, rich, complex, and constantly in flux. Continuous movement, in fact, defines America just as strongly now as it did during Tocqueville’s nineteenth-century visit.

Influences on American life from abroad are still predominantly European. But they are also clearly Judaic, Oriental, Middle Eastern and Afri-

can. Indeed, the history of those Americans who trace their ancestral origins to Africa is a major part of American life, and not only of American life. Their creative artistry in music has been exported around the world as an American cultural ambassador called jazz. Another example is located on the western coast of America where California is defined, every day, by Asian, Hispanic, Latin and Native American influences. Further illustrations are found in food, music, art and language, in the names of California's towns and cities, such as Palo Alto, San Jose, Los Angeles, and Sacramento, and in the cosmopolitan communities of the Chinese and Japanese in San Francisco. All of these aspects of life are an irreplaceable part of America's heritage.¹⁹

Americans are not generic. But whether they live in the north or south, in the east or the west, or in America's breadbasket, the Midwest, and whether they call themselves New Yorkers, Bostonians, Virginians, or Texans, they are all Americans by choice. Individuals of all cultures, whatever they may be, are Americans in America, where speaking English with an accent is commonplace, just as it was one hundred years ago. Some Europeans argue, with the intention of being critical, that there is no such thing as an American, that they come from everywhere. That, of course, is precisely the point. Part of being an American in America is that, indeed, they are from everywhere, but once they get there they become a different type of human being in how they look, how they act, and in how they think.²⁰



As Europeans observe the varied and colorful ethnic landscape of America today, they can recognize that the impact of things European remains more pronounced than any other. The explanation is found not only in the historical ties between America and Europe. It is also seen and experienced in the daily habits of American life which have been, in so many different ways, affected by European culture, customs, and traditions. In fact, European influences are so widespread that they tend to be regarded as American rather than European.

One of them is seasonal. It has become without question the most important commercial holiday in America, as well as the birthday celebration

of Jesus Christ on December 25. The greeting of “Happy Holidays” may be heard more often than “Merry Christmas,” but December is still that time of year when America, devoted to its tradition of decorated Christmas trees, carols and the gaiety of Christmas Eve, is most intimately affected by European art, literature and music.

American Christmas customs, including postage stamps depicting European paintings of the nativity, recall much of the Old World. One of the most popular carols in America is “Silent Night,” written and composed by an Austrian in a little village outside of Salzburg. The story of *A Christmas Carol*, by English author Charles Dickens, is performed in theaters all over America each December, as is sung the *Messiah* by German composer George Frideric Handel. And in both America and Europe one of the most popular songs ever, written by American composer Irving Berlin and made famous by Bing Crosby, is sung in English and in almost every European language. It is called “White Christmas,” and has even been translated into Latin.

Many other influences, not seasonal, are present each day in sights, sounds, tastes and names. They are seen in paintings and heard in music, read in literary and dramatic works, reflected in philosophy and science and religion, and are part of the art of a simple family meal around the dining table in millions of American homes every day of the year. European words are found everywhere in American language, beginning with the name of the pre-school to which all American children go. It is called *Kindergarten*, a German word which means a children’s garden. And when the children grow up and send an invitation to a party, they very often put on the bottom of it RSVP. It is a French phrase, *repondez s’il vous plaît*, which means “please reply.” The Old World is symbolized by the names of American towns like Berlin—there is a ‘Berlin’ in no less than eleven of the fifty states. And there are hundreds of other towns with European names, like London, Rome, Madrid, Paris, Stockholm, and Vienna.

For millions of Americans, too, favorite foods and drinks throughout the United States are of European origin—German beer and bratwurst, Italian pasta, English roast beef and Yorkshire pudding, Swiss cheese and fondue, Danish aquavit and pickled herring, beef steak and French fries,

Polish sausages, Spanish gazpacho and paella, Austrian schnitzel and noodles. All of these things are found in shops, in markets, and in restaurants throughout the United States, as are foods of other cultures such as chutney and curries, egg rolls and fried shrimp, tacos and burritos, and salsa which has replaced catsup as the most popular condiment on American tables.

Cultural and religious influences of Europe are especially striking in America's Middle West. In the state of Iowa, as one example, a complete list would be overwhelming, but its length is a powerful illustration of Europe in America. In Cedar Rapids there are superb Czech restaurants, a Czech National Cemetery, and a National Czech and Slovak Museum, opened in 1995. "The New World Symphony," by Antonin Dvorák, was written in Spillville, Iowa. The impact of Scandinavia is found in Decorah, where the Norwegian Museum has been visited, more than once, by the King of Norway. Americans as well as European tourists find the influence of the Dutch at Jaarsma's Bakery, the Strawtown Inn and at the Tulip Festival in the town of Pella. The French name of Iowa's state capital is Des Moines (The Monks). The list of Iowa towns with European names, if continued, could go on for several paragraphs and would include Lourdes, Hamburg, Waterloo, Cambridge, and Harcourt, the name of one of the oldest families in France, dating from the eleventh century.

The European tourist can also visit magnificent Catholic churches in eastern Iowa, in Petersburg, Dyersville and New Vienna. One of them is a basilica, and they all contain stained-glass windows made in Westphalia (in Germany), then shipped to Iowa in the nineteenth century. Today many of the parishioners of these churches still have German names. Finally, there is Dubuque, Iowa, one of the so-called Five Flag Cities found on the Mississippi River. Over Dubuque flew the flags of first the French, then the Spanish followed by the English, then the French again during the Empire, and finally the Americans. Indeed, the first Bishop of Dubuque came not from America, but from France, where he was born in 1792, in Lyon, during the French Revolution. He arrived on the Mississippi as a newly ordained bishop in 1839, seven years before Iowa became a state, and served until his death in 1858.



The remarkable nature of the European influence is that it is found everywhere in America. There are influences of the Spanish in California, Arizona, and Texas, of the French in Louisiana, of the Polish and Norwegians in Wisconsin, of the Dutch in Pennsylvania, of the Swedes and the Finns in Minnesota, of the Irish in Massachusetts, of the English in Virginia and New York, and of the Germans who traveled by packet boat from Lake Erie or up the Mississippi River from New Orleans to the Middle West of America. By 1860 almost one-third of the immigrants in America were from Germany. Fifty years later, in 1910, 8.3 million Americans, out of a total population of more than 92 million, were German born and more than one million had arrived from Sweden. The modern history of the Middle West is European, and those who live there encounter the European influence daily whenever they speak the names of their cities like Marquette (Michigan), Eau Claire (Wisconsin), Upsala (Minnesota), Paris (Illinois), Glasgow (Kentucky), Lafayette (Indiana), Steubenville (Ohio), or St. Louis (Missouri).

Places and things American and European cannot have the same degree of significance for everyone on either continent. But irrespective of the degree, American and European culture, politics, and economics are inextricably tied together. There is no question that the vision of the American dream and the soul of the American spirit, was laid first by Europeans—by men and women of widely different parentage and nationalities, who came originally from the Old World speaking foreign languages when they arrived. And thereafter, in terms of the essential difference, they followed their own path as Americans.

Many of them formed their own ethnic enclaves—such as the Spanish, the Italians, the French, the Germans, the Poles, the Czechs, the Dutch, and the Swedes. They were proud of their heritage and they preserved it—to this day there are Germantowns, and French quarters, and Little Italys in American cities. Many also continued to speak their native languages at home, and in some cases taught them to their children. But, they deliberately chose English as the language of their new country, and they taught English literature to their children. And they also did something else it had not been possible to do before. They gave their new

country their loyalty, and their allegiance. There they were their own rulers in their new nation.

Once in America the idea of freedom was no longer just a dream. It was a reality. They became American citizens, and entered a public realm of both privilege and responsibility. American society was thus given a unique dimension. Citizenship was a private choice, which often found the individual occupying the role of hero, whether it was a fireman saving a life, a policeman protecting a child, or a soldier awarded a Purple Heart. They did not refer to each other as English-Americans, or French-Americans, or Swedish-Americans. While they had strong disagreements and did not always act as one out of many, they shared a single goal. They pursued their new undertakings as Americans, building one nation. They knew who they were, and what they wanted to become.



Whether it was the Pilgrims in seventeenth-century New England or the Irish fleeing from famine in the nineteenth century, life in their New World became the history of courage and achievement. “The Irish experience in America,” to quote from the introduction to a documentary for American public television produced in 1998, “is a story of trial and triumph. For all Americans, and for all of us, it’s a story about America itself. It was a great victory. This is what they came here for. They didn’t come to stay together as Irish-Americans. They came to find something else. And in the end they found what they were looking for.”

What they sought was called many things: freedom from want, freedom to worship, freedom to dream, freedom to choose. They also found a way to describe the spirit of the nation they built, and wrote it down, not in the European language of English, but in the European language of Latin, as *e pluribus unum*, out of many, one. Drawing on this principle, individual Americans created a symbol, by themselves, without government oversight: the American flag. When Americans today “fly the flag” they are expressing their loyalty; they are reminding themselves, and the world, that pride in their nation is still part of the American enterprise. It was a surprise to no one in America that the “Stars and Stripes” appeared

everywhere, throughout the United States, following the attack on the World Trade Center in New York City on September 11, 2001. Flags were hung from the windows of buildings, flown from the radio antennae of cars and trucks, waved from front doors, and made into lapel pins.

The force and importance of this symbolism, however, was difficult to understand for many Europeans unfamiliar with American history. Journalists in Europe ridiculed this simple pageant of patriotism as a naive and “typically American” public display of private grief. But Americans thought it the most natural thing in the whole world to use a national symbol to show that, as individuals, they stood together as *out of many, one*. It made sense in terms of their loyalty to the American idea of freedom, whether the color of their skin was black, white, brown, or yellow.

It is on that common ground—the commonality of the American experience—that Americans of all backgrounds have since built their lives, and make their lives today. Even though Americans seldom speak, any more, of the enormous impact of Europe on American life, the formation of the American character is inconceivable without it. Yet that character, in all its essentials, is not European but uniquely American.