CHAPTER II

On History, Heritage, and Habits of Life

Geography, Distance, and Space

GENERAL DIFFERENCES, significantly influencing American and European life, begin with geography, distance, and space.

Americans are very much aware that Europeans come from individual nations, in the sense that when a European visits America and is asked where he comes from, he will not say Europe. He will give his nationality, such as Belgian or Dutch. When an American goes to Europe his response to the same question is different. He will normally respond, the United States, a few will say America, and some will just say ''the States.''

When Americans visit Europe they understand that they can only be in one country at a time, and that each country is unique. But they are sensitive to the fact that they are in Europe, to which more than two thirds of America's population can still trace its ancestry. When Americans speak of the Europeans they usually think of them as one group, and when they return home they often say they have been in Europe.

Although most Americans cannot provide detailed explanations, they know that there are geographical differences among Europeans of a kind that do not exist in America. But general knowledge infrequently goes beyond that point—and, of course, the same conclusion applies to European familiarity with America.

Most Americans are unaware, nor should they be expected to know, that Europe's most western point is Dunmore Head, Ireland, although some might argue it is Iceland, and that the Ural Mountains in Russia mark Europe's eastern border. The northernmost point of Europe is North Cape in Norway, inside the Arctic Circle, and the southern border, which can be debated, is the northern coast of the Mediterranean, but the islands of Malta and Cyprus are included in Europe, too. A point of contention is Turkey, at the eastern end of the Mediterranean. There are those, such as former French president Valéry Giscard d'Estaing, who aver that Turkey is not a European country, but its western border is hundreds of miles west of Cyprus, whose Greek part became a member of the European Union.[1]

To take this description a little further, Europe has 48 countries—50 if the Faeroe Islands and Gibraltar are counted—in which more than 140 languages are spoken. There are approximately 100 different ethnic groups represented in the Europe of the twenty-first century, not counting the more obscure minorities such as the Vlachs in the Balkans or the Ingrians in Finland. Individual countries are small and densely populated. Geography varies enormously, and distances between great cities in Europe are short in comparison to America.[2]

Differences in size between individual European countries and American states are dramatic. Germany can fit into the state of Montana, Italy is approximately the size of Arizona, France is twice the size of Nevada but smaller than Texas, and the Low Countries (the Netherlands, Belgium and Luxembourg) can fit into the state of Pennsylvania. The United Kingdom is about as big as New York State, but the U.K.'s population of around 58 million is almost four times as large.

Many of the characteristics Europeans call American have been shaped by geography. It goes without saying that the same point applies to Europeans, but in a more complicated way, because what might be called continental traits are influenced not only by geography but also by language and national borders. In both Europe and America geography is the story of how distance is perceived and space is used, but in precisely opposite ways.

The sheer size of America has a tremendous effect on how Americans behave, and also on how they think. For Europeans this is difficult to understand, because their countries are so small by comparison, and because it is not easy to visualize distance and imagine space. The observation may sound elementary, and even silly to Americans, but when Europeans talk about Florida and California many imagine these states are right next door to each other. This was not an unreasonable assumption at all for the lady sitting next to me at a dinner party in Berlin, when she asked if I would describe Florida. She had heard of the white beaches that went on forever and wanted to know what they were like. When I told her I had never been there, and had no idea how big Florida was, she gave me a look of incomprehension that meant, "Well, why haven't you?" Of course, she had never been to America and had no idea that Miami is more than 3,100 miles or 4,960 kilometers from San Francisco.

Americans who travel are aware, in general terms, of the great distances between major American cities in comparison to short distances between European ones. Many know, for example, that it is about 3,000 miles, or 4,800 kilometers, from San Francisco to New York City and some may be aware that the distance between Vienna and Berlin is about the same as between Los Angeles and San Francisco. But many Americans struggle when they try to explain the size of the continental United States in a way that helps Europeans envision the distance separating the oceans of the Pacific and the Atlantic.

If we use the passage of time as a measurement, however, because both Americans and Europeans understand it, the explanation becomes easier. The following comparison presents a picture that both Americans and Europeans can imagine: a Dutchman can board a plane in Amsterdam in the morning, fly to Paris, get out for lunch, and fly back home in the afternoon, but an American traveling from San Francisco to New York City will still be on the airplane. This illustration is helpful to Americans and Europeans alike. But if Europeans have not actually traveled across America, and most have not, it is difficult to expand beyond this relationship between time and distance.

How, for example, can Europeans comprehend the effect of the country's size on the American character, the American spirit, and on American behavior? The answer is that they cannot, because the European

concept of size has no complement in America. What is big to Europeans is often small to Americans, and what is big to Americans is often of huge proportion to Europeans. There are, in addition, many other aspects of American life that have been, or are influenced by continental distances and vast landscapes, such as American film, music and painting, as well as the American concept of what time means and how it is used.

The contrast between wide-open space in America, and the lack of it in Europe, is, like many other differences, simple in explanation and significance. The effect is captured perfectly in a small story of just several lines from the *International Herald Tribune*. It seems that in May 2003 a trip was taken by a group of Germans on a boat down the Missouri River, a waterway of more than 2,300 miles in length (3,700 kilometers). Their American guide, at one point, said to them, "This river must be really boring you," and they answered, "No, you have something we don't have in Europe—wild, undeveloped land."[3]

Americans may take this comment for granted, or dismiss it as stating the obvious. But for Europeans wild, undeveloped land is a symbol of the New World's frontier, and also of its self-containment. It is not surprising that Europeans have been making such observations for a long time, and there are a number to choose from. A recent one, however, is preferable because it addresses the present and not the past. It is striking in its conviction. It comes from a German, in his late forties, who lived in communist East Germany until the Berlin Wall fell in 1989. In 1991 he and his wife visited America for the first time and spent the next two years in California and Maryland. During the mid-1990s they returned several times to drive across America, and since 1996 they call to wish us a happy Thanksgiving, an American holiday they now celebrate in Berlin.

Burkhard's view of America is not unique, but his earnest expression of it is unusual in its strength and clarity. In early 2002 he wrote to me,

> Your country is big enough that you don't need to go outside for very much, and our countries are so small we are always stepping into someone

else's backyard. Most of the natural resources you need are in America. But I know there is a lot more to it than that. Being self-contained also has a lot to do with being free to choose from many alternatives for work and pleasure. Your mobility comes from that freedom, and both give you self-confidence. We see it when we visit you in America.

For example, and maybe this will surprise you, for me there is just one word to describe you. It is "openness." In German we call you *zugänglich*. That is another way of saying that Americans are friendly and accessible, and willing to help others in ways that we Europeans find both wonderful and overwhelming, because we ourselves are much less outgoing. That is why some Europeans who don't know you think your reputation for friendliness is superficial, or naive. Some even think you make it up.

But, and I hope you know it, Europeans who have visited your country find your warm welcome a breath of fresh air, to borrow an American phrase, which we do not breathe nearly as deeply at home. As a European, new to this difference, I am always startled by it, and before I met you I had never even thought about it. When the Wall was standing I could never leave East Germany to visit America.

There is no question in my mind that most European visitors to your country look on America as a place where anything is possible. Many Europeans also see frontiers in America still waiting to be found. The recent revolutions in communication and computer technology, and in biotechnology, are real examples and they explain why so many young Europeans move to your country. They know there is still the pioneering spirit, there are still new opportunities awaiting those willing to take a chance, and that the American adventure is not yet completed. This attitude, if that is the best word for it, is not found as often in Europe, because we live on a continent where bureaucracy and government make it hard for us to move, to get past the barriers that are put in our way.

Our frontiers were conquered long ago, and our building was transformed into reconstruction by the wars of the twentieth century. If you want to you can point to the fact that we have rebuilt our towns and cities many times over, but that is not the same thing. Look at the urban landscape in Berlin since German unification in 1990, for example. Construction cranes dot the city's skyline. It is enormously exciting and is giving our city a new life, as hundreds of American visitors tell us. But it is, also, a re-building.

> When I think of America the words "opportunity" and "openness" are part of my vocabulary, but that is also because I know your country now. Most Europeans, unless they have driven from the Atlantic to the Pacific or from the Canadian border to the Gulf of Mexico, cannot possibly imagine the breathtaking vistas of America's "wide open spaces." That is why Erika and I took the bus across the country to see America. In Iowa and Nebraska the land goes on forever; the first time we saw it we could hardly believe it. Everything is flat. Europeans can look at maps, but that does not help much. There just is not a substitute for driving across the Great Plains. Erika and I wonder if you can really be as aware, as we are, of how much the reality and practice of "openness" defines Americans? You are used to it. But, for us, it is a way of life, an outlook on life we will never have.
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> There are many reasons for this difference, and because you have spent so much time in Europe, you are familiar with them. You have told me that you are going to begin your book with a description of what you call the essential difference. I agree that the difference exists. But do not overlook that there are many other unusual characteristics, and all of them are important. Among them is the connection between your geography and your openness.[4]

Those Europeans who study the bent and bias of Americans and their behavior will find Burkhard's conclusions useful. They also, however, suggest additional observations. The romance of American geography is about the uncertainty of what may be found in the wide-open spaces, and is about the idea of freedom underneath the western skies. This is not as trite as it sounds. Rivers, plains and mountains have unquestionably left their mark on American behavior. More than one hundred years ago, in 1893, a well-known American historian, Frederick Jackson Turner, made this argument about expansion westward, and its effect on the American character. He presented his thesis in a now famous speech given to a gathering of historians in Chicago, entitled "The Significance of the Frontier in American History." In it he attributed "that restless, nervous energy that dominated individualism" to the influence of the frontier.[5] His writ-

ings called attention to "the pioneering experience as one of the causal forces responsible for the distinctiveness of the nation's social order."[6]

The unexplored American West that so many Americans discovered following the California Gold Rush of 1849 gave more than just symbolic meaning to the words open and expansive. More than one hundred and fifty years later European visitors react in much the same way to American geography. Nothing exists in Europe like the overwhelming beauty of the Rocky Mountains, the Wind River Range, or the Grand Tetons. The Alps are beautiful, but not since Hannibal have they presented the daunting challenge that was met by American pioneers trying to cross the Sierra Nevada Mountains in covered wagons in the nineteenth century. The feeling of majesty the mountains gave to those who saw them has been memorably described by a naturalist who came to America as a little boy from Scotland with his father in the 1840s. Of the Sierra Nevada John Muir wrote: "Oh, these vast, calm, measureless mountain days, in whose light everything seems equally divine, opening a thousand windows to show us God."

Wide-open spaces made America an open society in more than just a geographical sense. The country was so big that when Americans began settling it—whether it was in the valleys of the east, on the great plains, or in the wild west—building required the labor of many hands. No one could do it alone. The settlers, the farmers, and the cowmen could not wait for a construction company because none existed. Americans had to help each other. They did not have time to make distinctions between their private and public lives. Nor could they spend a lot of energy indulging the doubts and second thoughts they may have had about their neighbors. Their daily worries were an open book as they built America.

They spoke bluntly. Sometimes they did it loudly and they did not always get along, either, to which notorious range wars between cattle ranchers and farmers were violent testimony. But Americans were, to a great extent, dependent on each other. They had to develop social relationships that were based on the need to work together, not on the basis of who had done what to whom in Europe in the past. They could not afford to live in a European world that was closed and rooted in suspicion.

They did not have time. Their world was full of hardship and demand, but it was also a world full of opportunity. They took risks because that is how they made progress. Sometimes the risks were too great, and they failed, and sometimes the risks were overcome and the rewards were rich.

Americans developed what is variously called rugged individualism, independence, and self-reliance. They had to be strong and resourceful, whether it was building New England in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, or moving westward in the nineteenth and twentieth. The challenges of survival had to be met quickly, because there was no other choice. Time was in short supply. Americans were in a hurry to solve their problems, so they could move on to the next one. In doing so Americans depended on each other to build their communities, together—to clear the land, to plant, to gather the harvest, and to construct their houses, schools and churches.

They used weapons for hunting and protection, not only on the frontier but everywhere. Initially, law and order came out of the barrel of a gun, as they struggled to create a standard of justice and enforce a rule of law. The rigor of life in the New World taught Americans that to succeed they had to be independent. They defended their liberty with weapons, which is the story of the American Revolution and why the right to bear arms is inscribed as the second amendment to the American Constitution. They bore arms against the British during America's war of independence because there was no one else to bear them, although there was a good deal of help from the French who were just as determined to defeat the "the perfidious Albion"[7] as the Americans. The year 1776 was the American turning point, the end of the colonial struggle, and the beginning of America's belief in itself.

Some Europeans, as well as some Americans, criticize today what they see as an American preoccupation with guns, but are unaware that belief in the right of the individual to protect liberty and independence, with force if necessary, is as old as the republic. Others, however, understand the point very well, and make the distinction, such as an English businessman in Cambridge who wrote in 2001 that "the American instinct is to

trust the person and be wary of the government, in the belief that it's much safer to have a gun in the hands of an individual citizen rather than weapons in the hands of the government. . . . Europeans tend to think in just the opposite terms."[8]

The spirit of the individual, building from the bottom up, was a reflection of America's youth vis-à-vis Europe's age. There was no government to call on for direction, so Americans sought each other out, and developed a commitment to one another that also helps to explain, to a great degree, their generosity. That spirit of helping continues today in the form of private charities and voluntary organizations which provide services all over America, and abroad as well. In 2003, for example, Americans gave $241 billion dollars to approximately 1.3 million charities, equal to the gross domestic product of Austria.[9] This spirit, which Europeans experienced with the gift of millions of American CARE packages after World War II,[10] was demonstrated on an unprecedented level, following the December 2004 Tsunami disaster in southeast Asia. By the end of February 2005 Americans had raised, privately, more than one billion dollars to help the victims.[11]

American history has been described many times over with the same clichés, as a display of challenges to be met, of obstacles to be overcome, and of frontiers to be explored. Today, of course, most of that is over in a geographical sense, and America's critics conclude that Americans have nothing left to exploit, since their insatiable appetite, abetted by impatience, has consumed everything. But the entrepreneurial initiative they developed is still very much a part of how Americans think, whether they live in the country or in villages, towns and cities. Americans still see their society and their lives as wide open, and the possibilities as still endless. Some see this spirit, described by historians writing about the American frontier, as stronger today than it has ever been.[12] American farmers and ranchers overcome obstacles of the present every day, American businesspeople expect challenges they have not yet discovered, and American scientists are still newcomers to the exploration of space in comparison to what it will be like one hundred years from now.

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The foregoing is not intended to romanticize the idea of the American spirit, not all of which, historians accurately conclude, is made of freedom, openness and independence, such as the tragic and brutal treatment of Native Americans. The explanation is presented because the influence of geography, distance and space on American history, and on American behavior, represents a sharp contrast with the European experience. The contrast is also drawn, deliberately, in general terms because there are millions of Americans and Europeans who do not think about the effects of geography, distance and space on their lives, much less about why the effects are different in Europe and America. But significant differences are there, nonetheless, as Burkhard concluded in his letter to me, and ignorance or categorical dismissal of them does not make their reality any less dramatic.

In his second letter to me in mid-2002 Burkhard again wrote about openness and geography from a European perspective:

> American public and private life—your strengths and your weaknesses, your successes and your failures, your personal worries and your professional problems—is one big, open book. It is one of your great virtues, even though sometimes it makes you look childish, or worse, foolish. Your openness allows you to stare adversity in the eye, and overcome it. It gives you an abundance of possibilities, many of which you turn into riches.
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> You could well say that we have met adversity successfully, too. For me the peaceful unification of Germany and the rebuilding of Berlin are obvious examples. But I do not need to remind you that here the word adversity refers to a period in our history we would rather forget. Our trials were of our own creation. That is very different from the tribulations Americans dealt with, which were met with a positive spirit of surmounting obstacles to create something new, not rebuilding what we ourselves had destroyed.
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> Because our countries are small, and are so close together, we are always aware that Europe is a complex collection of peoples and a contradictory map of custom. Sometimes I think that the confidence and assurance you get from your vast and rich land allows you to forget that your abundance of mountain greenery does not exist in the same way in Europe. We do not have any wide open spaces. Our geography does not open our societies and present our lives with the vision of boundless opportunities. It keeps

them closed and reinforces our provincialism. We find security in "our corner" much more willingly than most Americans realize. And we know a lot less about our continental neighbors than you assume. You have only two of them, Canada and Mexico. We have many. Austria, for example, shares common borders with eight countries: Germany, Switzerland, Italy, Liechtenstein, Hungary and now Slovenia, the Slovak Republic and the Czech Republic.

Americans travel about constantly, not because they are innately restless or unhappy, but because they have the freedom and the space in which to do it; thus, many have lengthy daily commutes to get to their jobs and about forty million Americans each year change their address. On average they drive 12,000 miles each year, or about 19,200 kilometers, partly because it is convenient and partly because distances make it impractical to walk or use a bicycle. In comparison to the practice in America most Europeans do not move about in the same way. Some, of course, travel a great deal, and the spirit of exploration has European origins, not American ones. But Europeans do live with some constraints Americans do not. Gasoline costs much more than it does in America, and automobiles are expensive. Europeans pay more attention, as a consequence, to how much gasoline they consume, and to how much wear and tear they put on their cars. Few drive eighty kilometers for dinner in a restaurant, but Californians living in Palo Alto think nothing of driving that distance for dinner in San Francisco. The number of cars per capita is also distinctly different. In the EU it is about 470 cars for every thousand inhabitants, while in America it is about 760 per 1,000 people.[13]

Europeans love their fast cars, as every American knows who has driven on German autobahns, but rarely do Europeans drive them for three or four hundred miles at once. But if they do, and travel the same distance that separates San Francisco from Los Angeles, they may cross two, or even three different national borders. That makes them conscious, quickly, of changes in language, dress, and food, as well as in history, heritage and habit. A road trip of three or four hundred miles in America does not put the traveler in another country. And if Americans drive

through the mountains of Utah and across the expanse of Wyoming until they come to the continental divide, where water flows in opposite directions, they can experience a feeling of measureless calm that does not exist anywhere in Europe. If Americans are in the Rocky Mountains and look east, or west, they still see America while Europeans in the Alps can see not just different vistas from one spot, but different countries.

Space in Europe means something confining, not something expansive, and, during much of European history, it has meant something threatening as well. More than one hundred years ago this concern was the subject of an unusual conversation between the French ambassador to America and President Theodore Roosevelt's wife. During a discussion of pacificism Mrs. Roosevelt is said to have suggested that France might learn from the relationship between America and Canada:

> "We have a three-thousand-mile unfortified peaceful frontier. You people arm yourselves to the teeth."
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> "Ah, Madame," the ambassador replied, "perhaps we could exchange neighbors."[14]

The meaning of the response is self-explanatory. European geography, for Europeans, is more than just picturesque. The plains of Poland, for example, have been called a stepping stone separating Germany from Russia, while those living in Luxembourg describe their country as the marble between the elephants of France and Germany. The border dividing France and Germany is another example. How many times have the French and the Germans fought each other? A visitor to the Alsace-Lorraine, where the European Parliament meets in Strasbourg, will encounter German and French names everywhere as a reminder that this magnificent region also has a tragic past, dating from the battle of Tolbiac in A.D. 496. What the visiting tourist, however, is unlikely to experience today is the tone of conversations among French families in Alsatia whose homes were occupied by Germans twice during the twentieth century.

European populations live much closer together. The consequence is that privacy is more prone to invasion and difficult to protect. In America population density is about 32 people per square mile, but in Europe it is

134, more than four times as great. One can argue that problems of privacy in large cities are the same, whether in Europe or America. But European attitudes about privacy, whether one lives in the city or in the country, have been significantly shaped by battles over space, and hence, by the lesson of European history that it is wise to be wary, if not suspicious, of both neighbors and government. This explains in large measure why there is a side to Europeans which is protective, private and closed. It is behavior that has nothing in common with American practice.

This line, drawn between what is private and what is public, is not exaggerated. It is also a difference with which most Americans who have European friends are well familiar. It was put in a vivid way by a British visitor to America at the end of the nineteenth century. Since then, of course, an entire century has passed, but James Muirhead's conclusion is even more valid now than a century ago, thanks in large part to how we communicate with each other publicly, especially via radio and television. He wrote that Americans ". . . have as a whole not only less reverence than Europeans for the privacy of others, but also less resentment for the violation of their own privacy. The new democracy has resigned itself to the custom of living in glass houses and regards the desire to shroud one's personal life in mystery as one of the survivals of the dark ages."[15]

Another area of contrast, very much related to space, is the subject of land. Europeans regard the utility and define the meaning of land differently from Americans. Because there are few large private holdings, anywhere in Europe, land is precious, both psychologically and in real terms. Through centuries of inheritance, as well as war, land ownership has been reduced to smaller, and smaller morsels. The history of Germany is a good example, but all European countries have similar histories.

Vast tracts of land and open space are part of the American countryside. In a manner of speaking land is all around Americans and they buy and sell it frequently. Europeans, however, do not sell land often, because most of them own very little of it, if any. It is looked upon as something of unique value, and Europeans, if they are fortunate enough to have a small piece, not only keep it but consider its size a private matter. One of

the effects is that Europeans seldom ask, "How big is your farm?" or "How many acres do you have?" But Americans ask this question all the time, because property is considered a sign of wealth and success. So they ask the question in Europe as well, blithely unaware that Europeans consider the question rude.

When, however, Europeans do tell their American visitors how many acres they own, most Americans are unable to put the answer into any meaningful context. For Europeans 100 acres, which is about 41 hectares, is enormous. But that number is small by American standards. In 2002, for example, the average size of an American farm was 436 acres, which is about 178 hectares, while the average size of a farm in the European Union was 29 hectares, or about 71 acres. That makes the average American farm about six times as large as a European one, a comparison which fits nicely with another statistic of equal importance. Almost three times as many farms existed in Europe as in America in 2002, but on about one-third as much cultivated land.[16]

Those Europeans who have never traveled across America are not in a position to understand the reasons for American curiosity about the size of a land holding. But those who have sometimes describe it as reflecting a mentality of bigness. In a sense it is part of American culture, and Europeans recognize it everywhere—in big cars, big refrigerators, big water heaters, big houses, big supermarkets, big skyscrapers, and even in big hearts. But in Europe it is quite the opposite. European hearts are warm but reserved, European spaces are neither open nor large, and land ownership is a private matter.

Art and Music, Language, Manners, and Habits of Life

Geography is only one of the many differences that define the open and closed societies of America and Europe. Another is artistic form, such as painting, film and music, but also drama and literature. Considered in general terms, because there are notable exceptions, European art and music, as it has been created and written since the late Middle Ages and which many Americans know well, is a reflection of the taste and values

of patrons. The quality of art of the Old Masters is timeless, which is why several million Americans go to Europe each year to visit museums and art galleries. The same point applies to composers. The music of Bach, Beethoven, Couperin, Mozart and Vivaldi is played throughout America.

Americans, as well, have contributed more than their share to music, art, and literature, and they have also added forms which are characteristically their own. The arts in Europe stand in sharp variance to what has been created in America during the past 150 years, such as jazz, film, and the American musical theater and, to some extent, American landscape painting. The observation also applies to music popular on both continents, such as rock, rap, and hip-hop. The quality of European art and music has survived the taste of centuries, and Europeans are justifiably proud of it. But it recalls primarily the past more than the present.

American arts send a message dealing with the present, and also, in a sense, with the future. Many of the themes are about things that dreams are made of: imagination and hope, spirit and adventure, courage and success, the triumph of good over evil, of the positive over the cynical. This is especially striking in western films and in the musical theater of the twentieth century. But the message has its artistic origin in American landscape painting of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. There is found what has been variously described as a feeling of ''awe and wonderment,'' a power of ''untamed nature,'' an excitement at what the artists were seeing.

Those familiar with American art have little trouble identifying American from European landscapes, signed or unsigned, even if they do not have figures or buildings in them. Landscape painting reflected the vision of limitless opportunity in America. Artists like Thomas Moran, Albert Bierstadt, Frederic Church, John Kensett, Jasper Cropsey, George Caleb Bingham, and Alfred Jacob Miller all painted scenes of what inspired American imagination.

These paintings were often of panoramas with endless rivers and mountain ranges. American painters celebrated America's geography, whether they were in the east or in the west, or in the Middle West, because they could not ignore it. An extraordinary exhibit of these paintings, entitled ''American Sublime—landscape painting in the United States

1820–1880,'' was held in London, at the Tate museum in 2002. Of the ninety works just three were from museums outside America. A reviewer for the *Financial Times* in London wrote of the exhibition that ''what sets the Americans apart is the sheer scale of where they were, and what they saw. Where the Europeans would have had to search out their wilderness sublime, for the Americans it was simply enough to be where they were, for it was all about them.''[17]

Europeans generally are not familiar with American landscape artists or with the American musical theater, and know little about the message of the American ''western'' film. But those who do find in them a distinctly American approach to the adventure called living. What struck French writer Françoise Giroud about the difference between both continents was ''the degree of optimism, the exhilaration. . . . There is a strength in the United States that we in Europe constantly tend to underestimate.''[18]

American landscapes are about pursuit of the American dream, in a pictorial and romanticized way, and fill the imagination with stories of hope. Similar stories, however, are also told in American film and in American music. Both art forms tell tales about the triumph of good over evil. The frontier spirit is given life in films called ''westerns,'' with titles like *High Noon* and *The Man Who Shot Liberty Valance*. They starred actors like Gary Cooper and John Wayne, whose names are household words. ''Westerns'' are stories of American lives, where the ''good guys'' win and the ''bad guys'' lose on the frontier. American generations of the 1940s, the 1950s, and the early 1960s grew up with ''westerns.'' And some of them were directed by European immigrants to America; the director of *High Noon* was an Austrian originally from Vienna, Fred Zinneman.[19]

Today American children no longer watch movies about Cowboys and Indians very often. But, although much of what they do watch is considered by many Americans, and by even more Europeans, to be cultural trash, the lessons of the ''western'' are still found in American films which draw enormous audiences. Excellent examples are the Star Wars series and the Lord of the Rings trilogy. The themes are the same as they were when

the "bad guys" were punished by the "good guys" in the American west. They are about the virtues of independence, the spirit of adventure, the strength to persevere, the courage to overcome all odds, and the ultimate triumph of good over evil.

Stories of America, similar to those suggested in painting and told in film, are found in infinite variety in American music and song—such as in bluegrass music of Kentucky, Negro spirituals, Dixieland jazz and New Orleans jazz, country and western music born in Nashville, Tennessee, and songs from the American musical theater.[20] All of it, in one way or another, celebrates different aspects of the American character, such as the Kansas state song, "Home on the Range," which was President Franklin Roosevelt's favorite song. Much of this music is also a romanticized reflection of America's history of social change, movement, and mobility. While many Europeans are familiar with rap and rock, comparatively few have ever heard the songs of Stephen Foster or Hoagy Carmichael, like "My Old Kentucky Home" and "Camptown Races," or "Stardust" and "Ole Buttermilk Sky." Other examples are the music of George and Ira Gershwin, of Irving Berlin, of Jerome Kern, and of Cole Porter, made famous on the American stage by such singers as Ella Fitzgerald and Frank Sinatra.

The names of the latter two singers are well known in Europe, but the words of the music they sang, familiar to older generations of Americans, are not. One of the very best examples is Cole Porter's song about the wide open spaces, called "Don't Fence Me In." The song, which may originally have been written as a parody, reflects nonetheless an American attitude toward life. It was recorded by Bing Crosby in 1944, toward the end of World War II. Since then it has sold millions of copies in America, and is still popular. Its lyrics speak to the spirit found in wide open spaces:

> Oh, give me land, lots of land under starry skies above,
> Don't fence me in.
> Let me ride through the wide open country that I love,
> Don't fence me in
> Let me be by myself in the evenin' breeze,
> And listen to the murmur of the cottonwood trees,

> Send me off forever but I ask you please,
> Don't fence me in.
>
> Just turn me loose, let me straddle my old saddle
> Underneath the western skies.
> On my Cayuse, let me wander over yonder
> Till I see the mountains rise. . . .

American musicals are dramas of American life in all its freedom and in all its contradiction. They are stories of romance and hope, of the land, and of how Americans invented themselves, with names like *Carousel*, *State Fair*,[21] or *Annie Get Your Gun*. One American musical critic, Ethan Mordden, captured the spirit when he described the meaning of Rodgers and Hammerstein's 1943 musical *Oklahoma* as being about "Americans: their morality and government and spirit, how they learn the arts of compromise and tolerance in order to deserve the liberty that democracy fosters."[22] The lyrics of the songs are about the fields, the sky, the beauty of corn as high as "an elephant's eye" and the message they send is about the freedom of the open prairies.

Not all musicals, needless to say, are about "the wide-open spaces." Many, like *1776*, *Show Boat*, *Porgy and Bess*, or *West Side Story*, tell very different stories of American history, and in some cases are social criticism set to music. All of them, however, are about confronting challenges, and succeeding; they are about making life from the bottom up, not about directing life from the top down. Some of them illustrate as well an American inclination to cultural inferiority vis-à-vis Europe. This is conveyed perfectly in a song from *South Pacific* in which an American nurse from Little Rock, Arkansas, sings about a French plantation owner with whom she has fallen in love. The song is a fascinating American-European contrast: "We are not alike," the heroine sings. "Probably I bore him. He's a cultured Frenchman, I'm a little hick." While the message may be outdated today—*South Pacific* opened on Broadway more than half a century ago in 1949—it remains powerful because many Americans, both young and old, are sensitive to the cultural differences, which of course is one reason why they like to visit Europe.

Europeans rightly think of America as young in comparison to Europe, but how difficult it must be for them to imagine how wild America really was, and how young it still is, if they have never seen it. There is, of course, no substitute for traveling across America, but if that is not possible there are other introductions available. Among them are exhibits of landscape painting, "western" films, or the excitement of a visit to the American musical theater on Broadway. And it is especially in the American musical theater that words set to music tell powerful American stories. Few Europeans are familiar with any of them, but there is a little-known and remarkable exception. An Italian who composed such famous operas as *La Bohème* and *Madame Butterfly*, Giacomo Puccini, understood the power of the musical theater well. Almost one hundred years ago, in 1910, he entitled his new opera *The Girl of the Golden West*.

There are, needless to say, all kinds of cultural influences found in American society today. Some of them are contained in art, music, and film and some are not. Many of them, of course, have nothing to do with the western frontier and trace their origins to the frustrations of life in crowded cities. The influences of urbanization are bringing about dramatic and not always welcome changes in American society, and in European cities as well. Crime, violence, drugs, and poverty are just the beginning of a long litany of problems which Americans see in films, hear about on television newscasts, and read about in their newspapers every day.

European critics of America are well familiar with the litany. They often recite it, as though Europe had no list of its own, and sometimes give the impression that they understand American problems better than Americans do. Many lives in America, they argue, are stories without a future. Many Europeans, for example, can cite Martin Luther King's famous phrase, "I have a dream," as a dramatic symbol of American's history of discrimination, of the inequalities of American life. But while the phrase was uttered in the context of racial struggle, it was spoken as an affirmation of hope. And that is exactly the point.

Europeans are well familiar with the troubles that vex Americans, but few Europeans are acquainted with the American conviction that the

dream is possible and that Americans believe in it, whether it is a rugged frontier or a racial one. Day in and day out the belief is honored and given life, in a myriad of ways, and not only in movies, music and theater. Another one of those ways makes its appearance each year in January when Americans travel to large cities in ''Freedom Trains'' to celebrate a national holiday in honor of Martin Luther King.

Europeans live in societies which are far more narrow and much more provincial than Americans imagine. American tourists looking in shop windows, visiting museums and dining in restaurants always register new sights, sounds, and smells, but they cannot recognize what lies underneath the surface unless they live in Europe for a long period of time, and are able to speak at least one European language.

The elementary difference between the American and European experience with language has varied ramifications. Only one out of five Americans can speak, read and write a foreign language—any language—but for 16 percent of Europe's population English is the mother tongue and a further 31 percent claim they can speak English well enough to carry on a conversation.[23] That difference tilts the scale of perception and judgment. Europeans, partly because of their ability to understand English, think they know America well, and Americans, because so few of them can speak any European language, are much less sensitive to European custom and fashion. The following statistics, provided by the U.S. Census Bureau following the 2000 census, speak for themselves. In American households the language spoken most commonly at home, after English (215.4 million) and Spanish (28.1), was Chinese (2 million), thus eclipsing French, German and Italian over the decade of the 1990s.

The matter of language accentuates the differences between us. Americans call their language English, but Europeans call it American. They see two languages where Americans see one. To the amusement of some Americans and to the chagrin of others, this difference is referred to pointedly in Lerner and Loewe's musical *My Fair Lady*, based on a play by English dramatist George Bernard Shaw. The character of Henry Higgins, played in the film version by the English actor Rex Harrison, tells us

about language in a now famous lyric: "There even are places where English completely disappears! In America, they haven't used it for years!" But whatever Europeans think it is, language in America has one characteristic that is unique. It unites. That is, indeed, amusing when one recalls that it is a European language. It becomes ironic when one considers that language in Europe achieves the opposite effect. Europe's many languages divide.

In the European Union, for example, there is not one common language that unites, but more than twenty different official languages which divide, including Gaelic. There is also a significant grammatical usage in many European languages which separates the personal from the professional. In French and German or in Spanish and Italian, for example, there is a formal and an informal address. It amounts to a public and a private way to say "you," a usage still very much observed. Most Europeans would never dream of addressing someone they do not know well, with the personal and private "Tu" in French or "Du" in German. It is a distinction that is not made in modern English usage.[24]

There is also a more obvious reason why Europe's languages cannot play the unifying role that English achieves in America. On the continent different languages create different worlds in countries that are right next to each other. One consequence, of course, is that some Europeans learn to speak several languages—half of Europe's population is bilingual—and for many Europeans one of the languages is English because their professional lives demand it; in continental high schools 89 percent of the students study English. This ability is often interpreted by Americans as a sign of the sophisticated European. Many Americans are envious, and sincerely regret that they cannot speak French, for example. Europeans, for their part, are not without humor when they consider this difference, and are fond of telling a story about it in the form of the following question and answer:

> Question: "If a person who speaks three languages is called 'trilingual,' and a person who speaks two languages is called 'bilingual,' what do you call a person who only speaks one language?"
> Answer: "American!"

Of course, Americans could learn a second language, but most Americans do not see a persuasive reason to do so. Few Americans make an effort to learn, because whether they live in Alaska or Florida, they do not need a second one at home or abroad. The result is that less than eight percent of American university students today study a language other than English. American travelers can get along quite well in Europe, and elsewhere, just speaking English. Thus, not many Americans really know from experience, and are not prompted by geography to consider that ''to possess another language is to possess another soul,'' to borrow a phrase from Alexander Solzhenitsyn.

Nonetheless, sometimes Europeans give the scornful impression that because most Americans can only speak English, they are either arrogant or culturally deprived. In fact, often when Europeans point out that Americans speak ''American,'' they also condescendingly observe that if Americans spoke English ''English'' it would be easier to understand. For Americans, however, the only basic difference between English spoken in England and English spoken in America is one of accent, even though it is possible today to find separate dictionaries for English and for American.

Americans and Europeans can argue, if they wish, over the definition of cultural deprivation, but there is no valid dispute on the matter of arrogance. It is just a fact that English today is the language of the western world, just as Latin was the principal language of European law, religion and science during the later Roman Empire and throughout the Middle Ages. In France, for example, Latin was not officially replaced by French as the national language of law until King François I did so by ordinance in 1539, followed by the first French dictionary, which was not published until sixty-seven years later, in 1606.[25]

As it affects science and technology, international law and trade, we are again seeing the domination of one language, English. Many of the technologies invented since the end of World War II, used today in America and Europe, generally require the use of just English. The language has become, in fact, the linguistic standard of the Information Age and is also becoming a corporate language around the world.

English, indeed, has always been America's language, even though European immigrants brought with them many other ones. A perfect example, because it illustrates a common practice, is the case of a Swedish immigrant to America in the 1870s who settled in Seattle. He married the daughter of an Irishman, and they communicated in the language of America. Their children—the second generation of Americans in this family—learned little Swedish at home, but more about Swedish and Irish customs and traditions. In turn some of those were passed down to the third generation, whose members spoke of them proudly. But they learned no Swedish at all. For America's European immigrants, to be American meant you spoke English, which explains why many early immigrants refused to speak their native languages with their children, at least in public.

Today times have changed. In parts of the state of California for example, election ballots are printed in Spanish, Chinese, Japanese, Vietnamese, Tagalog and Korean, as well as in English. There are, of course, disagreements, large and small, about whether deliberate emphasis on linguistic diversity unites or divides.[26] But irrespective of the merits of being multilingual, the language of culture, commerce, and politics in America is English.

It is here that an asymmetry differentiates Americans from Europeans. Americans who move to France, for example, and master the language do not become French, because being bilingual is not a sufficient condition for being bicultural.[27] But emigrants to America who all learn to speak English, including Europeans, become part of the American pageant. They become Americans.

The role of language, as one of the threads tying together the patchwork quilt of Americans in the New World, is not an idle matter. It is true that many European immigrants to America held on to their native languages, and wrote and conversed in them in a wide variety of ways, and still do. But they also deliberately chose to learn English because there was no other practical alternative. Because they spoke many different languages and came from different backgrounds, English gave them something in common. No matter where they lived, throughout the entire history of

America, they have been able to communicate with letters and newspapers, first carried by the Pony Express and later by trains, cars and airplanes, as well as by telephone and telegraph, by radio and television, telex and fax, and finally today, via e-mail and the Internet.

Americans, however, have always been and still are a nation of many languages and accents, which is why Americans, unlike Europeans, do not take exception to how English is spoken and seldom comment on how it is pronounced. A European visitor to America can, indeed, go to New Orleans and speak French, to the Amana colonies in Iowa and speak German, or to Los Angeles and speak Spanish. But the point of significance is that Americans do not have to change the language they speak when going from one part of their continent to another.

"Languages," as German writer Peter Schneider puts it, "also serve to smuggle values, cultures and philosophical systems."[28] This proposition, in America, is not high on the list of national concerns. But in Europe, language is a matter of both politics and pride. The most striking example is spoken French, about which myths abound. One is that this language of diplomats is dying. But after English it is the most frequently taught language in the world.[29] Another, also found in the musical *My Fair Lady*, is Professor Higgins's observation that "the French don't care what they do actually, as long they pronounce it properly." Added to that is the old and often repeated myth of legendary French rudeness to language-impoverished American tourists who cannot speak French. The myth makes great cocktail party stories, few of which are true.

These myths obscure concerns considered legitimate in Europe, but in which most Americans have little interest. One is the consequence of pride taken in one's national language by members of the European Parliament, in which twenty-seven countries have elected representatives, thus creating enormously complex and expensive translation requirements. Another is what seems, to many Europeans, to be the relentless spread of English in all matters cultural, economic and political. In Europe the French, but by no means only the French, look upon English as a cultural invasion coming from America, dominating diplomacy and the global marketplaces of trade and commerce.

The growing adoption of English as the corporate language in Euro-

pean boardrooms is hardly an example of an American conspiracy, but for many Europeans the use of English is nevertheless seen as a threat to preservation of a cultural heritage. Those Europeans who feel strongly about this matter face a Hobson's choice from which there is no escape, because professional life in Europe requires, increasingly, a command of English. Thus, in early 2005 the municipal government of Madrid, which was competing to host the 2012 Olympic Games, announced that the city's taxi drivers must be able to speak English by the end of the year or forfeit their licenses.[30]

A more subtle difference, setting Europeans and Americans apart, and indirectly related to language, is how we hold a conversation. Americans get right to the point. Normally a guest in an American home has not been through the front door five minutes before he is asked what he would like to drink. Then hosts and guests go on from there, happy to see each other and to learn how things are going. It is a custom whose purpose is to put guests at ease, right away, and to assure them that they are welcome.

Europeans get to the point, too, but in an indirect way. They are just as delighted to see their guests, but usually they inquire first about their families, about how everyone is, and about what they are doing. And after a while they ask what they can offer their guests, but they do not do so right away, and seldom say, ''What would you like to drink?''

Americans, as well as some Europeans, may consider this point to be so insignificant that it deserves no attention at all. And many Europeans and Americans would surely say, ''If you live in a large city, it's always about the drink, whether you're in London or New York, Paris or San Francisco.'' But the difference is not of minor importance, because how Europeans and Americans talk, with friends and with each other, informally and formally, illustrates how they see relationships, both private ones and professional ones. They both know where they are going, but the path they take to get there is not the same. The paths they do follow really reflect two different concepts of an order of politeness and ap-

proach, two different habits of life. Each defines distinctly how Europeans and Americans treat everything they do.

The explanation for these differences in habits of life is simple, but also subtle; and that is the way it was expressed to me when I asked a French acquaintance, Elisabeth Burgess, to describe how we converse:

> Talking is about knowing how to live. In French we call it *le savoir vivre*. We think life is about receiving friends and acquaintances, about listening to what they have come to say, about being with them. It is about how we speak to each other, to old friends and new ones, about trust, and about how we communicate. It is about living life. It's not about having a drink.

My response to Elisabeth could be called a classic case of rising to the bait. I pointed out, with more vehemence than necessary, that the drink is not the issue for Americans, either. On the contrary, the point is to make your friends feel at home, which is why they were invited in the first place. But it is true that Europeans take more time to get where they are going. They start, as Elisabeth put it, with *le savoir vivre,* and often follow what seem to be, to Americans, indirect and circuitous paths. They get from point A to point B but, in a manner of speaking, they often stop at a café along the way. Americans, on the other hand, operate on the principle that the shortest distance between points A and B is a straight line; that is to say, they use time to get where they are going as fast as possible.

This difference is often apparent in how Americans begin telephone conversations. They call each other up and get right to the point, ''Hello David, this is Bob. I've got a problem. Do you have a few minutes?'' This approach is taken every day in America. But Europeans would invariably begin the conversation with a question, ''Hello Horst, this is Henning. How have you been? Tell me how your family's doing.'' Then, they listen for the reply.

By itself, whether a conversation is begun with American practice or European habit, is not of great moment. But knowledge of the difference, and the willingness to respect it, improves the quality of the exchange, which is an academic way of saying that it builds trust and confidence.

The difference in approach—the direct versus the indirect—may seem

irrelevant to Americans, some of whom have told me they do not have time for this kind of game and are unwilling to play it. That attitude is one I understand very well. But whether it is a game or not, there is a valid point. When Americans speak directly, in private or professional dealings, Europeans often find it offensive, although they seldom say so. They do not think this way.

It is true beyond any doubt that most Europeans do not appreciate why Americans are so straightforward. Unless they are well familiar with American history and habit, they often draw the wrong conclusion; namely, that Americans are rude and insensitive. Either way, however, the comparison illustrates a point of importance to us both. It is that even though we often leave a lot of broken glass along the edges of the different paths we take, each of us, in our own fashion, eventually arrives at the same place. In getting there, it may be helpful to us both to recall that how we communicate with each other affects the outcome of what we are trying to achieve. How carefully are we prepared to listen to each other?

Manners include not only what we say in a conversation and how we say it, but also how we behave. For historical reasons, already touched upon, Europeans live in societies which are far more structured than their American counterpart. Their behavior in public is more circumspect, more cautious, friendly to be sure, but also standoffish. They draw a clear line between what is obviously public and properly personal. For most Europeans it would be inconceivable to discuss personal problems with the utter abandon with which they see it done on American radio and television talk shows. Even though some Americans consider the display vulgar, most Americans draw little distinction between private and public life, and talk about both all the time irrespective of where they are. In Europe, American informality is legendary. Some Europeans do understand the reasons for it. But for many it is so public and so ostentatious that they are genuinely baffled by it.

Europeans, however, are far from alone in this reaction. Many Americans traveling abroad, who are conscious of the public-private distinction,

often cringe at the insensitivities of their fellow countrymen. Their embarrassment sometimes leads Americans to apologize, as in the case of an American friend waiting in line at an Air France ticket counter in de Gaulle airport outside of Paris.

In front of him was standing a tall and well-built man, in a broad-brimmed Stetson hat, talking at the top of his lungs, in a rude and peremptory tone of voice, to a petite and attractive French airline clerk behind the counter. When he left, my friend moved to the head of the line, and said,

> ''Excuse me, but I want to apologize for the behavior of my fellow countryman. The Americans I know are not rude and we do not pardon that kind of performance. It was insulting and unnecessary.''
>
> The young French clerk answered, ''Please, sir, do not worry about it. It does not happen often, and we understand that flying can be stressing.''
>
> My friend responded, ''That is very nice of you to say that, and I thank you for your patience. By the way, where is he going?''
>
> ''Well, sir,'' she explained, ''he is going to Dallas.'' After what seemed to be a very long pause, she continued, ''but his luggage, it is going to Seattle!''

Manners, or the lack of them, sometimes have unexpected consequences, as the foregoing story illustrates. In fact, many Europeans convey in their tone of voice and in their body language that American money is welcome, but American behavior is not. Why is this? Are American manners that coarse? Is American disregard for the social graces of the countries they visit really so blatant? Is the fact that young Europeans like American films, dance to American music, and eat American hamburgers, a capitalist conspiracy, for which American tourists should be blamed? It is especially this latter question that strikes at the nerves of the American traveler, and for good reason.

American guests at European dinner parties do not appreciate being asked, in an accusatory manner, why America has exported its ''culture'' to Europe, and they often respond awkwardly. Few, indeed, are aware that Hungarian-born Arthur Koestler answered the question, long before

McDonald's existed, in the early 1950s: "Who coerced us into buying all this? The United States do not rule Europe as the British ruled India; they waged no Opium War to force their revolting *Coke* down our throats. Europe bought the whole package because Europe wanted it."[31]

Koestler's logic is just as applicable today as it was fifty years ago. To take McDonald's as an example; the company had sales in Russia during 2004 of about $310 million, and was serving more than 200,000 customers daily in over one hundred different locations. These figures become more significant when it is noted that Russia is only McDonald's fifth-most profitable market in Europe, after Britain, France, Germany, and Spain, in that order.[32] The point is that Americans and Europeans do not always share the same tastes or the same standards of behavior, but they are quick, often too quick, to criticize. The consequences emerge often as feelings of contempt and resentment.

As is the case with many things, the significance of differences in behavior can be overdone, but it is nonetheless enlightening to hear a European talk about the way Americans dress, and describe how Americans approach the matter of a meal. The following view comes from a couple in Vienna, a professor of finance and his wife, an art dealer in nineteenth- and twentieth-century paintings, in a letter written in early 2004:

> Millions of Americans visit Europe each year. They go to our restaurants, buy things in our stores, visit our museums and galleries, attend concerts and the theater, and admire our churches and cathedrals. And, of course, as you do in America, if we see an American who looks a little lost understanding a menu or reading a map, we ask if we can help. But it seems to us, and we think to many Europeans overall, that American tourists sometimes forget they are guests in Europe. They don't demonstrate complete disregard for our sensibilities, but they make little effort to respect our ways of life. For example, how do they dress? Well, you know the answer to that. We understand that most Americans in Europe are on vacation. They want to relax, and we recognize that. But how they are dressed, in T-shirts, Bermuda shorts, and tennis shoes, is often more suitable for the beach than for cities whose beauty they have come to see.
>
> We don't like it, and you can hardly blame us if we judge Americans by what they wear. We recognize that neither Europeans nor Americans walk

> around all day in suits. But when we see Americans eating in a fine restaurant, dressed as though they were going to a rock concert, it makes us wonder whether you have any respect for standards at all. But it may be that on this point European tourists are just as guilty as Americans. We know that standards of dress are changing everywhere, in Europe just as in America.[33]

As I read this it reminded me of a colleague in Ann Arbor, Michigan. Several years ago he and his wife were visiting the wine country in Burgundy. On a late morning in October they found themselves in a little town outside of Beaune, and decided to stop for a quick lunch. So they went into a restaurant, which, unbeknownst to them, turned out to be a top restaurant with one star in the *Guide Michelin*. He was not wearing a coat and tie and his wife was wearing pants and tennis shoes for the car trip. Although his French was not very good, he was able to explain successfully that they just wanted to have salad and a sandwich. They were seated at a table, located near the drafty entrance. While the food was good and the waiter was polite, David and Ann both felt a chill in the service they could not explain.

When David had finished telling me this story I said to him, ''Look, I know you didn't intend to insult anyone, but quite frankly what did you expect? You were in a restaurant where dining is considered a pleasure, not a question of how quickly you can eat salad and a sandwich. Moreover, I suspect I know how most of the other people were dressed. Probably a good deal better than you two.'' He nodded his head, and I told him, ''If you ever have occasion to go back, make a reservation, wear at least a sport coat, tell your wife to skip the tennis shoes, and see what happens. I'll bet you will see a difference.'' And in fact, that is exactly what happened, when they deliberately returned two years later. They were there for more than two hours, in the middle of the wine country of Burgundy, and took the time to enjoy a wonderful meal. They were also treated with greater respect, a result which a coat and tie produces throughout Europe.

Taste, of course, as well as appreciation of good food, is not a European monopoly. Americans often encounter Europeans traveling through

America looking very casual in their Levis and sandals, happily stopping at every fast-food place along the way. But there is, nevertheless, a major difference in how we both approach a meal. For most Europeans, whether they live in a big city or in the country, lunch or dinner is something special. The dining table exists to serve that purpose. It is not a time to hurry. It is a time to slow down, to appreciate the company of those at the table, to savor the effort given to preparing a meal, whether it is at home, or in a restaurant.

Europeans are proud of their table, and the table is where 75 percent of the French eat dinner together as a family, whereas in America it is about 33 percent.[34] In a few words, eating is a celebration of life, not a tiresome inconvenience. One way to interpret the meaning of this difference was put in the form of an analogy by a former counselor to the secretary of commerce in the Reagan administration, who wrote in 2003 that ''food is to European culture what free speech is to American culture.''[35]

These predilections do not apply to all Europeans any more than they describe all Americans. The American habit of ''eating on the run'' has spread to Europe, too. Twenty years ago it would have been inconceivable to see Europeans eating sandwiches while walking down the street, because that is not enjoying something. It is saving time; moreover, it would have been considered uncouth. But even though Europeans are adopting the same practice, they still resent what they see as American culture infecting their continental *savoir vivre*.

Whether this conclusion is fair is beside the point, because Europeans use it to condemn an American way of life they do not respect. Manners give Europeans, so they often conclude, something of value in common. What Americans have in common in this area is that they often ignore the art of living and replace it with the art of movement. Perhaps few Americans or Europeans think of it in this way, but the distinction affects how they interpret the messages being sent by each other's behavior.

A similar comparison applies to the concept of time and how it is used in America and Europe. In Europe it is a state of being. In America time is

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a commodity. My Viennese friends made this point in the same letter in which they wrote about manners:

> To us, Americans are in a hurry. You are always going from one place to another place, and are constantly preoccupied with what can be bought and consumed. But how often do you stop to enjoy what you are doing? The historical elegance of Old Europe is not an empty phrase. Time moves more slowly on our continent. We delight in it and recognize the beauty and mysteries the passage of time brings with it. Some Americans, of course, can easily describe us as living in an "Art Musem" if they wish, but most of us believe that the hour does not strike for those who are happy.
>
> The iconoclastic culture of the New World is not elegant, and much of the artistic genius you admire in your museums and hear in your symphony halls was created by Europeans. We know that American pop-culture is exciting, but it also has a short life because it quickly runs out of images to break. It is superficial, too fast, and too loud. It allows no time to consider what has already been achieved. Your emphasis on speed, on always moving quickly, reminds us of a poem written long ago by a European, William Wordsworth. It begins with the lines,
>
> > The world is too much with us: late and soon,
> > Getting and spending, we lay waste our powers:
> > Little we see in Nature that is ours;
> > We have given our hearts away, a sordid boon!
>
> That poem, entitled "The World Is Too Much With Us," was written about us, almost two hundred years ago, in 1806. But today the world is very much with you, in how you talk to each other, and in how you eat and dress. It is especially with you in your waste, and in your pride in getting things done, now. What we mean is told in a story about time. It is a conversation between a Texan and a French taxi cab driver in Paris. It speaks for itself, we think.
>
> A Texan was picked up by a French taxi and driven through the streets of Paris.
> "What's that?" the Texan asks.

"It is zee Louvre, Monsieur!" the driver replies.
"How long did it take to build?" asks the Texan.
"It took over one hundred years, Monsieur," said the driver.
"Well, we have one just like it in Texas and it took only ten years to build."

There was a silence for a bit . . . until the Texan asked, "And what's that, over there?"
"It is zee Arc de Triomphe, Monsieur!" said the taxi driver, proudly.
"And how long did it take to build?"
"Ah, monsieur, zat one took seven years," the driver replied.
"Well, we have one just like it in Texas and we built it in only seven months."

Another silence, which lasted until the Texan pointed again, this time to the Eiffel Tower.
"And what is that structure over there?"
The taxi driver, after a long pause, replied, "I do not know, Monsieur. . . . It was not zere last week!"

Klaus and Elizabeth know America and Europe well. They both speak English fluently and raised their four children in Palo Alto, California, between 1982 and 2002, and their comments, for me, were of more than just passing interest. This was the second time they had written to me at my request, and my response to them, long overdue, was an attempt to explain the contrast.

. . . I think Americans genuinely appreciate that you deliberately make the effort to enjoy your privacy, your families, your meals, the calm beauty of your villages and countryside. We do recognize it, and it is something American visitors to Europe find enormously appealing. Why we find it so, of course, is simple to answer. It is because in America we always seem to be going somewhere, and more often than not, we complain that we are running out of time, as though it were merely a commodity. You may be familiar with the many phrases we have to deal with time, such as "a stitch in time saves nine," or "make hay while the sun shines," or "there is no

time like the present.'' And you have often heard, I suspect, the famous phrase ''remember that time is money.'' It was coined by Benjamin Franklin, a man who later became a great American friend of France, in an essay written in 1748 and entitled, ''Advice to a Young Tradesman.''[36]

I can understand why it may seem to Europeans that the pace of our lives is much faster than yours, but I also want to remind you, for the record, that a healthy respect for the value of time is not our invention. A Greek scholar and friend of Aristotle who lived during the fourth century B.C., Theophrastus, taught his students that ''time was the most valuable thing that a man could spend.''

. . . It is true that our concept of time is a reflection of many of the things we have often discussed together—America, a country that is not very old, and Americans, who are in a hurry to go forward, who want to solve problems quickly so they can tackle the next ones, who look at what can be accomplished in the short term because they fear there may not be enough time.

Your concept of time, in Europe, is based on a different history. Your concept of scale is measured in centuries, not in years and decades. Like Americans, you have a long memory, but unlike Americans, you also have a historical memory full of the lessons your history has taught you for over two thousand years. In Europe time is a balance of age and antiquity, of history and maturity, of prudence and wisdom, and of great success and disastrous mistakes. In America, wrote Oscar Wilde in 1893, ''youth . . . is their oldest tradition. It has been going on now for three hundred years.''[37] Perhaps that is what a French friend of my wife's meant when she told me that ''the difference between America and Europe is that Americans do things, and Europeans see things.''

I have always liked her comment because there are some fascinating elements of truth to it. Generally speaking you do draw on your history and heritage to see things we do not, and you tell us so. Americans use the experience gained from their history to justify doing things you do not want to do, or cannot do. Americans speak of freedom, and they will tell you why it is necessary to defend it. Europeans do not talk about freedom often, but when they do it is normally a discussion about what people are entitled to, and seldom about the opportunities freedom offers.

Finally, let me conclude by agreeing with you both. Yes, we are still doing things and we are still in a hurry. But we have a sense of the impor-

tance of history and heritage, too. Excuse the American tourists who are without manners, remember that we visit Europe because we feel drawn to it, to where many of our ancestors came from, and because we consider you our friends. Even though many of us cannot speak even one of your languages, and are not well familiar with your traditions, we have great respect for how you live. You celebrate life and European culture.

We know that our art, music, literature and architecture are young, and we are very much aware of just how young they are in comparison to the long history of Europe. But I hope you recognize that it is our understanding of our short history that explains why we still celebrate personal freedom. For us everything flows from that. That is why we are anxious to talk about it all the time—from the man on the street to the president of our country. Freedom is our life, and is the foundation of our culture. Some Europeans are fond of saying Americans have no culture. They are wrong. America's culture is freedom. And, Oscar Wilde notwithstanding, it is also our oldest tradition.

Views from the Backyard

The phrase "the American spirit" is used frequently in American discourse, and most Americans would agree that there is such a thing, formed by our history, youth and customs. It is a marvelously romantic image, and it is also a strong one that does not have a European counterpart. As a phrase "the European spirit" does not exist. But a European "spirit of history" does roam the continent nonetheless, even though it does not have a proper name. It is a way of looking at things, affected by the essential difference.

How are these two spirits interpreted? Or, to put it another way, what are they made of? "The American spirit," and the European one without a name, are sometimes explained in the context of the backyard. Readers of the European press know that some Europeans—active in business, politics, education, entertainment and journalism—subscribe to the following interpretation: Americans are provincial, their country is so big they do not have to pay attention to what is going on outside of their own backyard. Europeans are worldly, their countries are so small they do not

have a backyard, they must look outward and therefore have developed a sophisticated view of the world around them. It is the nature of our so-called backyards, they imply, that explains why Americans and Europeans see the world differently.

Is this an accurate description? Opinion is divided on this subject in Europe. Burkhard Koch, when he responded to my request to tell me if he could recognize a spirit unique to America, drew an unusually sharp and very different conclusion.

> Americans live in a world full of anticipation. You are forward looking, courageous, adventurous, spontaneous, open, and young. We Europeans live in a world full of cynicism, and are reflective, pensive, skeptical, suspicious, closed, and old. Americans accept differences between people, but Europeans do so much less willingly. So Americans look for an approximation of perfection, while Europeans are always seeking perfection itself, but they don't try often because they are unwilling to take the risk of failure. So they settle for the status quo.

I suggested to a French acquaintance that Burkhard's claim was overstated and she said, "No. The French are like St. Thomas. They doubt, until they see the wounds." A second explanation was given me by a French artist who told me that the French nature is that of "the cashier." She is a young woman who has a job. But it's not great, although it provides a steady income. She doesn't really like her job, and she seldom smiles when she is working; yet she is afraid to change jobs because she may end up with something worse. So nothing happens. Her life goes on, without much satisfaction, day after day, and when she leaves for work each morning her family says to her, "take courage."

A third response came from an Italian businessman, who is a large producer of food products in California. He reacted to the comparison by making a note in the margin of this manuscript. He wrote, "on this attitudinal difference here is an old Italian peasant/bourgeois saying that captures how people felt and feel: *Miseria stabile, Ricchezza mobile* (poverty is constant, riches are fleeting)." The note continued, "This saying is a re-

flection of the inherent skepticism that even when things are going well, it probably won't last! Related to it, for the purposes of your book, is another expression Italians use among themselves to describe someone who has had good fortune. The words *Ha trovato l'America* (he found America) speak directly to what Italians imagine is a land of plenty.''

Which is it? Provincial versus worldly, open versus closed, courage versus suspicion, or something else? Accurate descriptions of our backyards are not easily found, anywhere, because they are difficult to describe and because ignorance of them is widespread. Those Americans who have been able to live in America and in Europe—not just travel there—share the observation that what most Europeans think America seems to be, and what it really is, are two very different things. Most Europeans have never lived in America; thus, their knowledge of American life comes from television, film, magazines, and newspapers. This is especially true for impressions gathered from films; American movies capture more than seventy percent of the European film market, and half of dramatic shows on European television come from America.[38] A similar conclusion applies to Americans. They have little idea of European manners and customs, because few American travelers to Europe speak European languages, because European private life is closed to most American tourists, because American media pay little attention to European affairs, and because many Americans have never been to Europe.

What is the proper definition of the backyard? The explanation is not self-evident, because so many different experiences define our perspectives. But one thing is certain. What we see in each other's backyards determines, in large measure, the respect or disdain we have for each other, and shapes our desire to excuse or to accuse. What we believe our respective backyards are made of, therefore, is extremely important. Americans and Europeans have a responsibility to represent them, accurately, but seldom can they do so.

Some Europeans, who consider Americans to be rich and without culture, see a self-contained continent and therefore, a country whose domestic affairs and foreign policies are formed in a vacuum, without regard for the

interests and affinities of Europe and the Europeans. Those who choose this interpretation believe that America is all about greed and consumption, about having a whole lot of everything, about money and wealth acquired at the expense of others, in Europe and elsewhere. They do not know, and some do not wish to learn, that riches are not what define America or Americans. Riches are the result of what America is about. And what is that? If you asked Europeans this question, some would say America is about power, dominance, and violence, and others would say it is about freedom, hard work, and prosperity.

There is some truth in both answers, but each is incomplete. America is not about riches that can be measured on a scale, because America is about making an idea reality. It is about making choices, about finding opportunities and seizing them, about taking responsibility for success and also for failure. It is about the liberty of individuals to develop their own abilities. Some call this the American spirit, and others call it American selfishness. But whether the description is positive or negative, freedom is the ingredient that makes possible all parts of the American character.

Recently I asked a German friend of mine to tell me what she thought about freedom in America, and she said to me, ''You single out freedom, time and again, and it is boring. America is about many things.'' And she is right, of course. Life in America is about many, many things—contradictions and inequalities, waste and abundance, disparities between rich and poor, the sorrows of failure and the joys of success. But so is life in Europe and on this point Americans and Europeans are very much alike.

Where they part company is the way they display the essential difference between them, which explains, in part, why so many Europeans disparage what they see as simplistic American patriotic behavior. Europeans find signs of it everywhere in America, not only in the use of the American flag, but in the names like ''Liberty'' or ''Freedom'' Americans give their boats and airplanes, in the parades which mark American holidays, and in the creation of patriotic societies such as the Daughters of the American Revolution or the Colonial Dames of America. Some time ago the Greeks did the same, but the practice has long since disappeared.[39]

Europeans use names in similar ways. But European names draw first

on centuries of history, not on centuries of freedom. Consider the names of public squares, or even of subway and train stations. Some names do celebrate the accomplishments of famous people or reflect cultural achievements, but many of them also recall historical events, such as the train station in London called Waterloo which commemorates the defeat of Napoleon in 1815, or the name given a metro station in Paris called Tolbiac. It is a place near Cologne where Clovis, the first king of the Franks, defeated Germanic tribes in A.D. 496 and took possession of Alsatia.

European use of names is a reflection of age and time that is absent in youthful America. But Americans do draw on the significance of an idea, which is why the words "liberty" and "freedom" are used as proper names. Americans consider this to be perfectly natural, but seldom does it seem self-evident to Europeans.

Americans do not find the idea of freedom boring, at all, because they believe American history tells the opposite story. But, nonetheless, the conclusion is drawn by many Europeans, again and again, that American preoccupation with the idea of freedom blinds them. Sometimes it is presented as a statement, as is the case with German writer Peter Schneider, who argues that "the impressive integrative power of American society seems to generate a kind of obliviousness to the world, a multi-cultural unilateralism. The result is a paradox: a fantastically tolerant and flexible society that has absorbed the whole world, yet has difficulty comprehending the world beyond its borders."[40] At other times the tone of the conclusion suggests an accusation, as though Americans are unconcerned with anything outside "fortress America."

The suggestion is not entirely without merit. There are, after all, more than 295 million Americans and not all of them are fascinated by world affairs. News coverage of events abroad takes up less than 2 percent in the average daily newspaper in America. Less than 1 percent of all American students enrolled in college, for example, study abroad and less than 10 percent of students are required to take college-level language courses. Moreover, in 2004 only about 17 percent of Americans, not all of whom go to Europe, had passports; that means millions of Americans have never been introduced to life beyond America's borders.[41]

Young Americans today, those between the ages of 18 and 24, know

relatively little about world geography, not to mention Europe. On this point the results of a survey on geographic literacy published in late 2002 are enlightening: 87 percent could not locate Iraq on a map, 76 percent could not find Saudi Arabia, 49 percent could not identify New York City even though they knew it was the site of the 9/11 "ground zero," and 21 percent were unable to locate the Pacific Ocean. Slightly more than a third knew where the island featured most recently in the American television reality show *Survivor* could be found.[42] The only possible conclusion to be reached is that younger generations of Americans are appallingly ignorant of the geographical world around them.

American life has always been acted out in its continental backyard, but for much of that time Americans have also taken an active role in world affairs. That role has not always been played perfectly, and Americans recognize that they have made mistakes aplenty. But they can also look with pride on the contributions they have made toward making the world a freer and safer place in which to live. It was not out of naiveté that America came to the aid of Europe in the twentieth century, nor was it because Americans were hopelessly idealistic, a condescending observation Americans hear from European intellectuals on a regular basis, and not only from them. America went to the aid of Europe, on the contrary, because most Americans believed in the cause of European freedom, and had the courage of their convictions. American men and women did so because they wanted to, not because they were ordered to do so by their government.

Some Europeans find this difficult to believe, because their long history reminds them that warfare is conducted by government conscripts not by volunteers. In European societies built and ruled from the top down idealistic volunteerism is not a distinguishing characteristic, so it may be understandable that many Europeans ignore the comparison with America.

On occasion, indeed, it is even dismissed out of hand, which occurred during a conversation I had in late 1999 with a member of the French Senate in his mid-seventies. We were talking about American soldiers in Europe during World Wars I and II. He had a lot of questions, quite

cynical in nature, about American policy and about why America had entered both wars so late. I said to him, ''But you've forgotten the most important question.'' ''And what's that?'' he asked. I said, ''Why did Americans go?'' He looked me right in the eye and said, ''Because your government told them to.'' I responded, ''No, they went to defend freedom, some as volunteers and some as conscripts.'' He just shook his head and said, ''It was in America's self-interest. You saw the danger of a spill-over.''

My French host made it clear he was displeased and did not pursue the matter further. I remain certain that he thought I did not recognize how the real world works, and I do not know if he heard or understood the point I was trying to make. But there is a consideration here that my French host should not malign; nor should it be blown out of proportion by a sympathetic American reader. It is, once again, the impact of the essential difference on how we think.

If I had continued our conversation, I would have argued that the majority of Americans take pride in the idea, vision, and reality of ''the American spirit.'' They are adamant in their conviction that it is more than just an ideal. It is not something they wish for, it is something they practice. They believe personal freedom is both a privilege and a right, and that defending it is a responsibility. It is a commitment they have made throughout their entire history. It would be foolish to say that America has always been right, and most Americans know that no country is in perpetual possession of the truth. America's critics, of course, are fond of drawing attention to the mistakes, and loath to observe that Americans have also tried to learn from them.

Americans, however, have also learned from European mistakes. Of the many lessons Europe's history has taught Americans it is that there is always someone trying to take away freedom from somebody else. When this occurs, and it has been a recurring aspect of European life for centuries, Americans want to help, if they can. They could during World Wars I and II, and thereafter. That is why they went to Europe. They did not go because ''their'' government ''told'' them to.

American students of literature are well familiar with a famous poem written by English poet and theologian John Donne, entitled ''No Man Is an Island.''

> No man is an island, entire of itself;
> every man is a piece of the continent,
> a part of the main; if a clod be washed
> away by the sea, Europe is the less, as
> if a manor of thy friends or of thine own
> were; any man's death diminishes me,
> because I am involved in mankind; and
> therefore never send to know for whom
> the bell tolls; it tolls for thee.

Although it was written almost four hundred years ago, in 1624, its message has not lost either its vitality or its validity. Would Americans be able to name the author and the title of the poem today? Probably just a few. But most Americans are well aware that when the subject is freedom, and its defense, there is no safe backyard and no man is an island. Those Europeans who profess to believe that Americans are spoiled by comfort and consumption should refresh their memory of American history. If they do they will discover that what they believe is not true. America did not take the advice Thomas Jefferson gave to President James Monroe in 1823, ''never to take part in the quarrels of Europe.'' By the same token, Americans who claim that Europeans are plump with paradise and lean with power, may recall that the Cold War was won by Europeans and Americans together; neither could have won it alone.

It is not surprising that Europeans describe the backyards of America and Europe differently. What do they see in their view of the American backyard? When I put this question to my Viennese friends in 2004 they began their explanation with a question:

> Why don't you admit it? America is self-contained and self-confident! You really do not need the Europeans. And you should not be offended if many

Europeans see it that way. That does not mean we admire you less. But we do not like it when you talk about your ideal of freedom as being beyond criticism, as being the only one of any real substance, and that no one can possibly understand the value of freedom as well as you do. We would not call your attitude an arrogance of power, as some of America's critics do. But we would call it an arrogance of belief. We tell you that because we have learned something about Americans from raising our children in California. To put it politely, it is difficult, if not impossible, for Americans to imagine that the idea of "the American spirit" is not as popular everywhere in the world as you believe it should be. And it never occurs to you to stop long enough to think about it.

Your history and heritage tell you that freedom is everything, and that it will prevail. But, that is not always true. You should remember, for example, that it was the English historian, A. J. P. Taylor, who once wrote, "'Freedom does not always win. This is one of the bitterest lessons of history." We would point out to you, also, that America is not really dependent on anyone else, at least not nearly to the extent that Europeans are. You can afford to indulge your conviction that freedom is an end in itself. Your faith in yourselves and your isolation from foreign shores permits you, and sometimes even encourages you, to draw conclusions and act on them, irrespective of repercussions elsewhere, outside your own backyard.

It is a luxury that we in Europe do not enjoy. None of our countries are independent in the way America is. We believe in freedom and we believe in its defense. But in Europe the defense of freedom means depending on and getting along with a lot of other countries economically, politically, and militarily. We call that obligatory diplomacy and for us it is a two-way street. What country in Europe is self-contained enough, in the American sense, to act unilaterally? There is none, and if there were, we wonder if Americans would like it. In the past there has been such behavior in Europe, and it has always ended in disaster.

Europeans understand the value of freedom, which is why they fought the Cold War with you. But Europe was not built with freedom. Freedom has prevailed in Europe in spite of European history, or perhaps because of it. America, on the contrary, was made with freedom, which is why you talk about it all the time. But we would caution you that many Europeans think you sometimes speak about freedom as though Americans have a copyright on it. You talk about it as though you invented the idea, as though European history were the same as your own.

What you fail to see is that Europeans and Americans do not share "a love of liberty," they share the words. Europeans interpret their meaning very differently, because the circumstances are different. We do not share the same resources. We do not share the same history of rule. We do not share the same experience of relationships with other countries. We do not share the same independence to act. Because that is true we do not always agree with your conclusions that America's idea of freedom is the most important thing in the world, nor that everything else, to quote your national security expert, Condoleezza Rice, is of "a second-order effect."[43] We believe this conclusion is simplistic and unnecessarily condescending.

These observations may try your patience, but that does not make them invalid. We think there is a European message here, and it goes like this: Our painful history has taught us that the world is a complex place; do not tempt fate by seeing only what you want to see. This message is a veiled warning, made out of admiration, not jealously. We are saying that even though you may believe you can afford to pay less attention to balance, to the nuance, to the different shades of grey in the world, you cannot.

Our historical experience has taught us this, and yours has not. Our history is not the story of winning the war of independence as it is in America. We applaud your courageous spirit, and we believe you when you say that no man is an island. But we also caution you to remember that no two islands are the same. Americans associate their backyard with freedom and patriotism; in fact you often use the words as thought they were interchangeable. Europeans cannot. They associate their backyard with war.

Klaus and Elizabeth made their point. The backyards are not alike. Europeans and Americans define them differently because they are different, and they focus on different things when they gaze beyond them. Our separate historical experiences distinguish our horizons, and what we see shapes our perspectives. They concluded their letter as follows:

For some of us in Europe the different backyards mean we marvel at your courage to move ahead, we are envious of your sense of invention and initiative, and we admire your willingness to try something new. We have these qualities, too. But, in a way very different from you, we also are captives of centuries of our own history, burdened by our authoritarian struc-

tures, and limited by our geographical boundaries. Change in Europe occurs slowly for these reasons. This does not mean our convictions are weak, or that we do not value political and economic freedom as strongly as you do. But it does remind us that Europeans and Americans do not always take the same road to get to the same place.

So we close with some advice gathered from our European experience. Be a little less self-righteous, a little more modest, and much more attentive to the reasons why we don't always see the world in the same way. We have not always followed this advice ourselves, and we have paid a high price for not doing so. But the advice is sound, and it is well meant. If Americans, as well as Europeans, can follow it, it will benefit us both.

They had touched the main issues, all that is except one, which is a sensitive matter for Americans. Europeans, when they want to attack what they view as a naive American view of the world, assert that wars have never engulfed the American continent and that Americans, therefore, cannot understand the real meaning of conflict. Thus, so goes the explanation, the Civil War, in all its tragedy and destruction, was something Americans started and ended themselves, at home. Pearl Harbor was an attack on an island, not on the continental United States. World Wars I and II, as well as the wars in Korea, Vietnam, and Iraq, were wars that Americans elected to fight on the other side of oceans. They were not fought in the alleys of Cleveland, Ohio, as European wars have been fought on European streets. The inference is that American history has not blessed Americans with the ability to recognize that the world's backyard is more complicated than the backyard of flag-waving, bright-eyed, bushy-tailed Americans.

Many Americans who have heard this interpretation of the legacy of American history do not accept it with equanimity. They know that America's historical time frame is short in comparison to the European, but America's long-term memory about threats to freedom, and about the value of loyalty and patriotism, is very much intact. Both are based on an idea which Americans have never left in the backyard. The idea is a multicultural reflection of a set of beliefs. "Patriotism," American historian Walter Berns has written, "is not place but principle. The word 'father-

land' . . . does not occur in our patriotic vocabulary because our allegiance is not first of all to our native land (the word 'nation' comes from the Latin *nasci,* 'to be born') but to the ideas of freedom that animate it.''[44]

Without these ideas the American spirit would not exist, and without that spirit America would never have gone to the aid of the Europeans in the twentieth century. Would Americans go to the aid of Europeans in the twenty-first century, if they again needed help? The answer must be hypothetical, but it can be framed effectively in the form of a question: Would Americans stay home? Would the Europeans go to the aid of Americans, if the roles were reversed? They all did so during the war on terrorism in Afghanistan. And some did during the war in Iraq. What does this tell us? The question calls to mind what American writer James Baldwin wrote in 1961: ''Europe has what we do not have yet, a sense of the mysterious and inexorable limits of life, a sense, in a word, of tragedy. And we have what they sorely need: a sense of life's possibilities.''