

Mission America
Chapter 4: Hope and Rejection
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The European discovery and settlement of the New World is one of the great sagas of human history. The two continents of the Western hemisphere were torn from their traditional existence and transformed into a “new world” for the nations of Europe. The Americas remained a separate place, but their societies, their economies and their destinies rapidly became reflections of Europe, its history and its conflicts. Cultures and societies of the native peoples were either destroyed or changed beyond recognition. At the same time, by establishing images of themselves across the Atlantic, Europeans were also changed permanently by the influences from the New World.

This reciprocal fertilization of Europeans and their American offspring has defined their joint existence for nearly five hundred years. To this day, neither side of the Atlantic comprehends fully how it is influenced by the other. The very act of exploration and colonization was so momentous and so dramatic in its consequences that neither the discoverers nor their offspring can fully comprehend the implications of their existence. We are one cultural and social entity which harbors dozens of different identities. None of them can break free of its need to define the Atlantic world in its image.

At the beginning of its sovereignty, the new United States felt an urgent need to define itself separately from the European homeland. It built what I would call “the myth of place” in claiming to be fundamentally different from Europe even as it was remaining closely tied to it. The belief in American exceptionalism became deeply engrained in the psychology of the United States.

Since World War II, Europeans have reversed the process. A prostrate continent needed to regain a sense of identity destroyed by war and division. European’s own “myth of place” has been to retreat from the global vision of the early explorers and define their futures within the geographic and organizational boundaries of a postwar Europe, even as their interests reached far beyond it. As the 21st century began, the globalized economies of Europe and North America found themselves retreating psychologically into the old national units of the past.

In reality, the cultural and economic boundaries which define various identities have never run through the middle of the Atlantic. Our rich cultural heritage belies a simple Europe-America split. Understanding the process of hope and rejection which has built our mutual and our divided identities is one of the keys to bulding a prosperous future on both sides of the Atlantic in a new millenium.

I learned early on about hope and rejection from my own family . All four of my grandparents were born in Europe: two in East Prussia and two in Cornwall which is part of Great Britain. My German grandparents emigrated in 1882, shortly after their marriage. They were not poor and not political refugees. They wanted simply to build a new life in the new world.

As they were planning their wedding, my grandmother, Luise said to her fiance Christian, that her cousin in America had invited them to join him there. She wanted to go, Christian did not. “Fine, she said, “then I will go alone.” He of course went along. They became farmers and bore eight children. But despite the urging of one of their sons, they never wanted to return. They refused to speak German to their children. They wanted them only to be Americans.

Like my grandparents, Europeans came to America for many reasons. But whatever their purpose, they and the powers who sent them were marked indelibly by the experience. Clues to the origins of current American behavior can be found in the history of the European settlers. The political and economic history of Europe was also influenced considerably by the great geographic expansion of European civilization made possible by settlement of America.

Many important aspects of current European life, such as sugar, tobacco and potatoes, came from this new world. Even more meaningful for our purposes is the way in which development of permanent communities in North America stimulated both the economies and the intellectual life of England, and France. Both the industrial revolution in England and the French revolution were stimulated by events in the New World. But the enslavement of African peoples also resulted from the success of the new colonies. So did the eradication of many native cultures.

Our purpose is not to trace the complete history of the New World. More important is to understand how the North American areas settled primarily by the English and the French evolved into the modern nations of the United States and Canada. These two countries share more than a long common border. The wealth earned (or stolen) by Europeans on their present territory, the battles fought, in particular by the British and the French against each other and the resulting expansion of European societies across the Atlantic are central to the American narrative of today.

First, there were the explorers, traveling in search of adventure or simply to earn money. Columbus convinced the Spanish crown that he could break Ottoman control of the routes to Asia by charting a Westward course across the Atlantic which would land him in Japan. His calculations were wrong, but the return on his voyage was many times that expected by his sponsors. Stories of the great wealth found by Spanish explorers in South America, or the sugar cane riches of the Caribbean stimulated the imaginations of hundreds of adventurers who made their way to the New World.

Expeditions to Virginia or Canada were financed by investors, the venture capitalists of their day, for the simple reason of getting rich. English settlement in particular was

stimulated both by the growing merchant and industrial classes as well as by the proliferation of groups of normal people looking to establish lives in the new world.

To the Europeans of the 16th and 17th centuries, the new world was exactly that – very new, very unknown and at times frightening. Explorers brought back stories of cities of gold and monsters of every sort. There were Andean natives with heads like dogs, Patagonian giants more than three meters tall, albino hermaphrodites and serpents and monsters of every sort.

When eye-witness reports did not suffice, those who had stayed at home simply made up visions of the most unbelievable sort. Trouble was, the new world was very different and at times very exotic. Its geography, its climate and its inhabitants were more than enough to keep writers and intellectuals puzzling for centuries puzzled about the nature of life there and about the qualities of its inhabitants.

As early as the 16th century, i.e. when very few Europeans even lived in America, European writers were questioning the values of life there. The idea of such uncontrolled freshness attracted the interest of populations ruling monarchs were struggling to keep under control. Pictures of primitive free peoples put in question the many social theories worked out by intellectuals bound to the tightly knit structures inherited from feudal Europe. To some there could be only one conclusion: America was a massive mistake. An example of poor navigation by Columbus and criminal intent by the explorers who followed.

These sentiments were summarized by the Comte de Buffon writing in his *Histoire Naturelle* in 1774:

“In these melancholy regions nature remains concealed under her old garment and never exhibits herself in fresh attire. Being neither cherished nor cultivated by man, she never opens her beneficent womb....In this abandoned condition, everything languishes, corrupts, and proves abortive. The air and the earth, overloaded with humid and noxious vapors, are unable to purify themselves, or to profit by the influence of the sun, who darts in vain his most enlivening rays upon the frigid mass.”

As the 17th century began, the English colonies of North America took on a new character. They began to receive settlers who had left their homelands in search of a new way of life rather than gold or riches. Many of the first groups who came to English North America were religious congregations who found it difficult to exist in the repressive atmosphere of Europe. Others were social reformers, seeking to build new sorts of communities in the new world. Many were persons who simply wanted a better life.

There were the famous Puritans who came to Massachusetts via Holland from their homes in England. There were the Mennonites from Krefeld who were the first official German settlers in what became the United States when they landed in Pennsylvania in 1683. Pennsylvania itself was organized as a haven for outcasts from Europe by the

Quaker leader William Penn. Directly to the South, Maryland Colony was established by Lord Calvert as a refuge for Catholics feeling the sting of intolerance in England.

Here, it is important to note that most British and French had no interest in braving the wilderness of the new world. It seemed strange, dangerous and far away. In the British colonies in particular, those willing to settle in the new world were often true believers, either religious, social or purely commercial. A combination of strong principles, desire for a better life and an emphasis on personal initiative were among the strongest motivations of many of these groups. One group followed another until the cast of society in English North America assumed its permanent shape.

French explorers and settlers had traversed the St. Lawrence all the way to the great lakes even before the English established a strong foothold. Many present day cities in the United States such as Detroit, St. Louis and New Orleans were originally settled by the French. The battle of Quebec in 1757 forced France to cede its territories in Canada to the British. French cultural and economic influence remained strong all the way to the Mississippi until the early 19th century.

But the English language and legal and economic systems were the established way of life and they defined the future of both the United States and Canada. The power of the British monarchy had been limited by an elected parliament for several hundred years. The tradition of free commercial and intellectual classes was well established. Free thinkers of all sorts proliferated, even as they were often suppressed by the Crown or the Church of England.

As Harvard Professor David Landes comments in his groundbreaking book “The Wealth and Poverty of Nations:”

“For some nations, Spain for example, the Opening of the World was an invitation to wealth, pomp and pretension – an older way of doing things, but on a bigger scale. For others, Holland and England, it was a chance to do new things in new way, to catch the wave of technological progress. And still for others, such as the Amerindians...it was apocalypse, a terrible fate imposed from without.”

These elements: firm belief in the goodness of one’s cause, the more open and liberal economic and social system of Great Britain, and the vicissitudes of an untamed continent contributed to the sense of ambition which remains fundamental to the character of today’s United States. In the words of de Tocqueville: “The whole life of an American is passed like a game of chance, a revolutionary crisis or a battle.”

The temperate, easily accessible territories in the north of America offered a perfect outlet for the dynamics of English society in the 17th and 18th centuries. In particular, the

luxury of space and free land, the fertile soil and the security from foreign invasion offered by the ocean boundary was similar to the island nation of England and provided a perfect environment for evolution of 18th century British culture into the individualism of America as we know it today. Despite its great diversity, to this day the United States remains a society based on English Protestant traditions, including the self-confidence and often self-righteousness which results from living on a secure and prosperous island.

The new colonies were open to settlers and offered freedom and the hope of prosperity in return. But these were industrious, family places expected newcomers to accept the morality of Protestant Northern Europe. God and the Bible were the guiding principles for many of the new societies being established. Hard work and family values defined public morality. Above all, these new Americans believed that they had left the unwelcome precincts of Europe to find a new life and a new sense of liberty which was often denied them at home.

The riches of the new continent provided a bountiful harvest for many of the colonies. Armed with their sense of moral destiny, the success of their lives in America made it easy for the settlers to believe they were in fact chosen people. They had been the ones to leave the old, dark continent for the bright future of America.

The hardships they incurred were only further proof of the goodness of their cause. Almost from the beginning the New World saw itself as an example for all of mankind. John Winthrop, governor of Massachusetts Colony proclaimed in 1630 a vision which guides American thinking to this day: "We must consider that we shall be as a city upon a hill, the eyes of all people are upon us."

Vision and Mission in One

The sense of mission which characterized the early period of colonization has been captured with amazing accuracy at *Plimoth Plantation* south of Boston. Over the years, a private foundation has recreated a village similar to the first settlement built by the Pilgrims after their arrival in 1620. The calendar in Plimoth reads 1627. Local citizens take on the roles of actual residents of that time. They have learned the regional accents spoken then, they have mastered the skills of the craftsmen and farmers and they can talk about the hopes guarded by this tiny settlement only seven years after its founding.

One thing a visitor to Plimoth feels rapidly is the certainty of these settlers in the protection of God for their undertaking. The Pilgrims might today be called religious extremists. They guided every action according to the Bible. Before coming to America, they had lived seven years in Leiden Holland to avoid the strictures of the British Crown. As tolerant as Holland was to them, it was also absorbing their culture. The Pilgrims left for America in order to protect their uniqueness.

Such certainty led almost naturally to self-righteousness and alienation both from the home country and from the environment in which they lived. The Massachusetts Colony survived to a considerable extent, with the help of the local Native American population.

But the sense of moral superiority of the Pilgrims was so strong that they never established a community with the sophisticated natives who live in their region.

Over the first fifty years after the first settlements in Massachusetts, relations became so strained that a full scale war broke out between the English settlers and the native Americans, known as King Philip's war. The pattern continued throughout the Westward settlement of North America. Threats to the security of the settlers were considered to be moral and cultural catastrophes which must be stamped out at any cost. Native American populations were moved off homelands or often simply decimated. A strong sense of this sense of threat from non-believers could be felt in George Bush's war on terrorism. .

This tendency to define the nation's history as a national epic focused on the conflict between good and evil has characterized American life almost from the beginning. The early Pilgrims who founded the Massachusetts Colony were pious and intolerant in one. Their aggressive, controlled way of life can be found today in many aspects of American behavior.

A nation forced to live at the edge of wilderness had little time for the niceties of European civilization or for the self-introspection of established societies with long political traditions. As a result, Americans are still today focused more on building their society than on explaining its meaning.

Europeans often comment on the lack of true intellectual debate in the United States and on the superficiality of much conversation. Americans themselves often decry the anti-intellectual tendencies in their public life. But in the end, they have little time for the complex social and structural analysis which forms the foundation for "intellectual" discourse in more traditional societies of Europe and Asia. Americans do not draw comfort and authority from the state. They do not see their world as a collection of communities and loyalties seeking the bounty of an often recalcitrant state. They have no need to ask about the origins of their society or whether or not it is just, nor do they have a sense of tragedy. They live their justice daily and they see no value in self-analysis.

The interests of European Monarchies in the settlement of America were much different than those of most of the settlers. We obviously originate from the same roots. The two sides of the Atlantic have been bound by a common destiny almost from the moment that North America was settled. But the identity of Europe and America is also one of competition and alienation.

The European focus was on power and economic advantage. Most of the great wars fought in Europe in the 16th and 17th centuries were also carried out in America. As the 18th century progressed, the mercantilist system of trade through empires laid a new foundation for prosperity in Europe.

European colonial administrators thus did not share the moral fervor of the Anglican settlers for the righteousness of their American experience. They looked skeptically and cynically on the beliefs of many of the settlers. Since they were deeply sceptical about the myths of their own societies, they assumed the Americans were just as dishonest about the values they portrayed. Rather than moral superiority, they often saw corruption, dishonesty and even ruin in the colonial adventure. They treated the colonies as crude and uncivilized places.

As a separate American society began to develop, the hopes of the Americans were very often opposite to the goals of their colonial governors. To those who stayed behind, America was not the promised land, but a dark wilderness which could be exploited for economic or military gain, but not a part of European civilization.

In return, the colonists tried to demonstrate not that they were separate, but that their version of European society was better than that of the mother countries. This debate over who is the rightful heir to the grand traditions of the West persists in trans-Atlantic debates to this day.

America as a Mirror on European Society

This endless European debate about the nature of America reached a peak in the eighteenth century and returned again at the beginning of the 20th century. In each case, it coincided with major changes taking place in Europe.

After all, the settlement of America was part of an outward explosion of European commerce, culture, religion and military power which was in effect the first modern phase of “globalization” as we now call it. During the 400 years between 1500 and 1900 the entire geographic, political and cultural maps of the world changed dramatically under the pressure of English exploration. Great portions of the world were “opened” to the rest of humankind by the feats of European adventurers. New products and new industries were built around such exploration.

Almost from the beginning of the age of exploration, European explorers and settlers began eradicating native populations as they established their way of life in new territories. The Indians of the Caribbean, the native Americans of North America, the Inca and Aztec empires. All disappeared under the pressure of European expansion.

In many places they were replaced by native Europeans who established their own versions of societies exported from the mother country. This process was most complete in North America, Australia, New Zealand and parts of South America. The “Europeanized” colonies rapidly moved from dependence to independence and established nation states based on European languages and traditions. In many cases, these new countries moved more rapidly to equality and democracy than did their mother nations. They are now known for openness and lack of respect for the manners of the old world.

By the 18th century the American colonies served another important function – as a place to deposit “undesirables” from home. Europeans of this era believed that the best means of dealing with social malcontents was simply to get rid of them – to send them to other places. That these might have been among the most creative elements of an authoritarian society was a fact lost on the Europeans, but a great gain for North America and Australia.

British colonies in North America and the Spanish and French colonies in South America began serving as large outdoor penal colonies for the mother countries. The southern part of the United States adopted a more mercantile culture which often mimicked the great landowning areas of England. Their fortunes were often built on large farms whose survival depended on slavery. These patterns of settlement influence life in the United States until this day.

The American revolution, so celebrated by the United States, was viewed in England as the work of profiteers, speculators and scoundrels, who incited rebellion against the mother country to line their own pockets. France was delighted with the chance to exploit unrest of the American rabble to pin down and weaken the British in America, thus also paying back the humiliating defeat in Quebec in 1757 which ultimately drove France from North America. Commenting on the criminal behavior which led to the American revolution, the great English lexicographer Samuel Johnson noted: “I am willing to love all mankind, except an American.”

Needless to say, the wealth and the national pride of Europeans grew immensely during these centuries. A sense of European manifest destiny grew up which continued unabated until the wars of the 20th century. But so did the debate about the meaning of European engagement in this new world. The eighteenth century was the century of discourse and logic. Learned writers of that era found signs of most of the burning issues of the time in the discovery of America. Interestingly enough, much of the debate was pursued by French scholars, such as Guillaume Reynal, whose history of the new world at one point exceeded thirty volumes. But British historians and theologians also played an important role.

Three themes seem to have dominated this first big trans-Atlantic controversy – the degeneracy of America and its inhabitants; the negative effects on European society of the worldwide search for wealth and power which was represented most dramatically in America and also, however, the openness and democracy of the societies which had been established by European there.

Describing this 18th century debate, the renowned American historian Henry Steele Commager concluded:

“By now it was clear that those who asked ‘Was America a Mistake?’ were not really talking about America, they were talking about the Old World, about nature and

civilization, Mercantilism and Physiocracy, about the corruptions and misfortunes that afflicted their own societies.”

Independence from Great Britain brought new confidence and new energy to the two million inhabitants of the United States. The task of conquering a new continent became the focus of great energy. First westerward expansion came with the discovery of the Cumberland Gap, the first land route beyond the Appalachian Mountains. There was a virtual flood of settlement into Tennessee and Kentucky and down the Mississippi river.

Thomas Jefferson set the stage for an American sense of “Manifest Destiny” with his purchase from France of a great portion of the American continent from the Mississippi River to the Pacific Ocean. This Louisiana purchase added a new and vital element to the American character. The “frontier” was the laboratory and foundation of an ambitious American nation. Jefferson himself believed that American expansion would result in an “empire for liberty.”

Jefferson added: “...I am convinced that no constitution was ever before so well calculated as ours for extensive empire and self-government.”

This Westward expansion amplified the characteristics of self-confidence, ambition but also piety which had been established in the original settlements two hundred years earlier. America became a rough and aggressive society in which industry and profit were held in higher esteem than stability and culture.

The Special Nature of Americans

During this period, two special American traits began to develop which sets the United States apart from its European roots – fairness and conformity.

Arising from this pragmatism is the American belief in fairness, a trait which Europeans often praise. When I first arrived in Germany, I found that there was no real word for American “fairness” in the vocabulary of the day. In the meantime, the English word has been adopted in much of Europe as a description of a way of dealing with others which is balance, tolerant and pragmatic in its character. This is a trait which most Americans would ascribe to themselves and they would probably be right. A society which is secure in its moorings has no need for to debate and defend opposing points of view as energetically as is the case in many other societies. It can also be tolerant in listening to and cooperating with others who do not share its point of view.

I learned this lesson clearly in the mid-1980’s when I was the United States Minister in divided Berlin. I was concerned that debate of the future of Europe was veering off course because of the great peace debate caused by the conflict over medium range missiles in Europe and by the unrest in Poland and other countries in Eastern Europe. In my view, fears in Germany about the danger of nuclear war had caused German leaders not to support the democratic Solidarnosc trade union as strongly as it should.

To investigate these issues, I organized at my residence regular dinner meetings on questions of the future of Mitteleuropa. Participants came from several countries and from many points of view. I found the discussions very stimulating and useful. But I was soon surprised by the reactions of many of the German participants. Some said they wouldn't come again, because they couldn't sit at a table with people of such opposing points of view. One person told me he could never cooperate with Solidarnosc, however democratic it may be, because it was supported by the Catholic church.

Others, however, complimented me. They said that they had met persons at my table whom they would never think of talking to in any other context. The American commitment to fairness and openness was welcomed by these people, even if they disagreed with much that was being said at my table.

But as positive as American fairness can be, it is here where we encounter two fundamental paradoxes of American life. Conformism and Egotism. . Arising from an absence of fundamental debate is also a tendency to reject persons or leaders who do question the basic tenets of popular culture. If the foundations of a society are considered to be endless open to improvements, those who do not believe in America's inherent perfectability must somehow be different and maybe even dangerous. If the desires of the population are considered God given, those who suggest limiting them are objects of criticism and even anger.

Freedom and tolerance are widespread in America. But, as noted in an earlier chapter, the foundations of the American identity are based on principles of outlook and behavior rather than on organic communities or historically-based institutions. In today's computer-speak, we would say that Americans live in a virtual nation, where principles and institutions are continuously being redefined through behavior rather than through established practice. There is no long historical tradition to fall back on.

This trait was observed by de Tocqueville:

"In America the majority raises formidable barriers around the liberty of opinion; within these barriers an author may write what he pleases, but woe to him if he goes beyond them. "

Even in their individualism, Americans tend to be more conformist in matters of taste and morality than are many Europeans. The desire to fit into established patterns of behavior is a natural result of the need for new immigrants to be accepted in their new homeland.

It is the conflicts within European societies which also ratify the tendency to attack the basic premises of the way of life. Americans do not exclude members of other groups as is often still the case in Europe. But if a newcomer wants to be accepted by American society, he or she must become "American" in every sense.

This trait continues to this day in the sameness of American cities, the lack of deep intellectual conversation and debate and in the quick and often violent reactions to criticisms by outsiders. The epithet “anti-Americanism” is too often applied to even mild doubts or criticism from abroad.

Alternative lifestyles are tolerated, but only within traditional American frameworks. And in diplomatic dealings, American negotiators often adopt highly principled positions which undermine their own interests. Much of the behavior during the last eight years of American government can be traced to this trait of national personality.

It is these deep differences in cultural understanding which does underscore the gap between the origins of the societies which founded the American colonies and the consciousness of the Europeans who came to live there. It , represents a never-ending story which to this day has a direct effect on the way in which Europeans and Americans deal with each other.

“I do not like them. I do not like their principles. I do not like their manners. I do not like their opinions. I do not like their government,” wrote Frances Trollope an English gentlewoman who lived with her family in the United States for seven years in the 1820’s.

Mrs. Trollope later became famous for her book Domestic Manners of the Americans, which she published after her return to England. Mrs. Trollope was the first of many European travel writers who sent home dramatic reports on American during the 19th century. Count Alexandre de Tocqueville’s Democracy in America remains a classic analysis by an admirer of American society which is relevant even today. But the majority seemed to agree with Sigmund Freud who said in a letter to his wife after his first visit to the United States “Amerika ist ein Fehler, ein gigantischer Fehler.”

As rough as life may have been in North America, it offered a prize which many of the European intellectuals failed to appreciate. This was the sense of individual freedom and achievement. Freedom to live and think as one pleased. And above all the freedom to define society and even history as part of individual ambition rather than as the summation of dynasties, wars and decrees as was often the case in Europe. Freedom and prosperity have not been squeezed out of a repressive aristocracy, but rather are the product of individual achievement. The “state” in the European sense does not exist. As Hegel once put it: “Amerika ist eine Bürgerliche Gesellschaft ohne Staat.”

Henry Adams was the grandson of the second American President, John Adams. He spent a year at university in Berlin in the late 1850’s. He reflected American rejection of authority in his description of university teaching in Berlin, published in his celebrated memoir The Education of Henry Adams, many years later:

“The instruction was not bad. It was their system that struck the systemless Americans with horror....No other faculty than the memory seemed to be recognized. Least of all

was any use made of reason....The German Government did not encourage reasoning....All state education is a sort of dynamo machine for polarizing the popular mind, for turning and holding its lines of force in the direction supposed to be the most effective for State purposes.”

Most Americans seemed early on to agree with Plato who said in his Ion, “Poetry is nearer to the vital truth than is history.” Americans believe that freedom and social harmony come from this nearly poetic interplay of elements. The famous 19th century American historian Frederic Turner believed that the pure embodiment of these American traits was the openness of the great North American frontier. Americans, he said, “have an antipathy to control.”

This democratic hope of America was returned to Europe during the revolutions of 1848. The United States was the only major country to recognize the sovereignty of the Frankfurt Parliament. It even sent one frigate with crew to Bremen as a contribution to the Navy of the new German democracy. And, when the revolution was suppressed, thousands of Europeans fled to America to live in freedom.

1848 began a wave of European emigration to the United States which lasted until the First World War. The consequences of this great movement of people are usually described in economic and cultural terms, but the foundations laid in 1848 also had an important effect on the future evolution of Europe and the United States. And the effects have not always been positive.

Professor Horst Dippel von der Universität Kassel erinnert an die heftigen politischen Auseinandersetzungen in Deutschland vor und nach der Revolution von 1848 und meint:

„Doch diese Auseinandersetzungen führten nicht zu einer Stärkung der Freiheit des Einzelnen in Deutschland sondern zu einer Betonung des Übergewichts des Staatsgedankens, und das in einer Zeit als Millionen Deutsche das Land verließen, um in Amerika ein neues Leben zu beginnen.... die Auswanderer hatten eine Vorstellung von Freiheit und menschlichen Entfaltungsmöglichkeiten, von Leben, Freiheit und dem Streben nach Glück in Amerika.“

Die Ziele der Zeit um 1848 fanden ein starkes Echo in den Vereinigten Staaten. Das amerikanische Bild von Europa wurde stark durch politische Flüchtlinge und Einwanderer beeinflusst. Wichtig war, dass die großen Ströme der Auswanderer zeitgleich mit dem Anfang der europäischen Konflikte und des autoritären deutschen Nationalismus kamen .

Das heißt, die Auswanderung ist für die Beziehungen zwischen Europa und den USA seit dem 19. Jahrhunderts, ein zweischneidiges Schwert gewesen. Auf der einen Seite, enge Kontakte und die Integration der pragmatischen Aspekte der europäischen Kultur in der amerikanischen Ethik. Ich bin zum Beispiel sicher, dass die positive amerikanische Haltung Deutschland gegenüber nach dem zweiten Weltkrieg durch diese unterschwellige Bindung beeinflusst wurde. .

Auf der anderen Seite, eine unterschwellige Antipathie, die bis heute andauert, und die ich durch meine eigenen Grosseltern gehört habe. Die Einwanderer, besonders die deutschen Einwanderer wurden zu einer anderen Art Europäer: tatkräftig und erfolgreich, aber äußerst individuell. Sie lehnten die autoritäre Gesellschaft des Kaiserreichs entschlossen ab. Die Liste der Erfolgreichen, konservativen Deutsch-Amerikaner ist sehr lang. Aber nur selten identifizieren Sie sich mit dem friedliebenden Sozialstaat, wie man ihn heute in Deutschland findet. Donald Rumsfeld steht stellvertretend für viele andere.

Die Antipathie war gegenseitig. Ein nationalistisches Deutschland schaute unsicher und argwöhnisch auf den großen nordamerikanischen Partner. Manche fühlten sich überfordert von amerikanischen Ambitionen. Wenn man die politische Reportage dieser Ära heute liest, erfährt man starke Bedenken auf beiden Seiten des Atlantiks wegen deutsch-amerikanische „Konfrontationen der Macht.“

Viele waren durch amerikanische „Systemlosigkeit“, wie Henry Adams es vor 150 Jahre beschrieben hat, immer noch sehr beunruhigt. Wie der berühmte Reisejournalist Arthur Holitscher schon 1913 die Lage beschrieb:

„Die treibende Unruhe ist es, aus der man hier herüber so vieles erklären muss. Die Hast Amerikas ist keine simple Hetzjagd nach dem Dollar....Sondern der Dollar ist nun mal eben die gegenwärtige Münzeinheit, durch die die ungeheuere Arbeit, die Amerika in seiner Hast fördert, bezahlt wird. Aktivität ist das Wort, das dieses Land, das Rätsel dieses befremdlichen Land erklärt....“

Dieses befremdliche Land. Wie ähnlich sich doch die Urteile heute sind, wie bekannt die Vorwürfe an die amerikanische Kulturlosigkeit, an die berüchtigten "amerikanischen Zustände" und an den amerikanischen Unilateralismus.

20th Century Partnership and Rejection

By the end of the 19th century, American had become a serious competitor on the world scene and the debate over which side of the Atlantic offered the best model for the new industrial revolution had been fully joined. The growing empires of Britain and France and the burgeoning industrial society of Germany offered considerable room for debate. As a former colony itself, the United States rejected colonialism and regularly condemned the British and French for their empires. America burst on the world scene in 1898 by winning the short-lived Spanish-American war and ending the Spanish Empire in the new world.

But even as Americans were studying in droves at German universities, the imperial system and authoritarianism of the Kaiserreich was increasingly rejected. Criticism of the German system became so loud that the renowned industrial psychologist Hugo Munsterberg, who was born in Danzig in 1863, but had made his reputation in America, wrote a short book entitled “American Traits from the Point of View of a German.” Actually, the book was about German traits. It was a very personal effort by a well-

known German-American to build sympathy for the German social and political system. He had little success.

I have heard similar descriptions of European life uttered by Americans well into the 21st century. There is something anarchic in American thinking which leads towards the presentation of history as a tableau of individual accomplishment, almost always with a higher purpose. The contradictions between the high principles of the founding fathers and the reality of a rough frontier were overcome by aiming at the higher mission for which the American people had been chosen by God. The words of the original settlers rang as true in 1830 as they did in 1630. And indeed they echo loudly through American political rhetoric today.

Non-Americans often find inconsistencies between American rhetoric and the realities of history and current society. Especially when visiting the United States for the first time, Europeans who have grown up on American legends and pop culture find real American life to be disappointing. And in many cases they are right.

Most foreigners do not understand why America often disturbs them so much either. Most want to keep close to America, but there is that black hole which they keep falling into. It is often not the substance which bothers them, but the repeated expression of feelings, of religious belief or patriotism. There are too many flags on the buildings. All of this unsettles in ways they cannot describe. But when they hear it, America becomes uncomfortable and sometimes dangerous.. Much of so-called anti-Americanism is in reality caused by this black hole – this gap between perceived reality and the way in which Americans portray themselves. Ultimately it seems inaccurate, wrong and even threatening.

But what is harder to understand is that despite the most dramatic criticism of American conditions from Americans themselves, belief in the goodness and ultimate success of their country remains virtually unanimous trait among Americans of all walks of life. This conviction that America is on the right track is even stronger among poor immigrants and the underprivileged

Writing about this aspect of American culture, the renowned German America expert Gebhard Schweigler noted: "...because Americans were united in consensus on liberal-democratic values, because they believed in the promise of exceptionalism, and because their political culture allowed and encouraged them to become active in the pursuit of presumed perfection, they were able to deal with conflicts arising from the gap between creed and credibility in a nearly unique way: they became a 'driving force' for reformation of the political system."

The great American auto pioneer Henry Ford once put this thought into American vernacular when he exclaimed upon seeing ancient European castles: "History is bunk." (Quatsch). But this same Henry Ford built the best museum of Americana in his home town near Detroit. His museum tells America's story of progress and happiness through

architecture, industrial goods and folk art. School children go there by the thousands to learn America's story. History as poetry.

Reform, not revolution. The expectation of imperfection as the foundation of belief. As suggested above, an astronomer defines it as dark matter, the secret element of American society. It is a very Christian principle. Redemption through the confession of sin. Every American leader including Barack Obama presents his or her vision in terms of returning to the principles of an ideal society, rather than changing it fundamentally. History is used not as a warning about the past. It is not a set of rules for behavior, but a stimulant for even greater accomplishment.

When Barack Obama began his inaugural address by proclaiming his intention to "remake America," he did not mean that the United States needed a new political or economic system or that the principles upon which the nation were based were not still valid. Quite to the contrary. By remaking America, Obama intended to return the country to its original state. This is the essence of American identity.

And it is this certainty of redemption through imperfection which often angers America's friends. It is seen as arrogance or provincialism or at a minimum insensitivity to the real problems of the world. In most cases, this sense of American exceptionalism should not be confused with arrogance or insensitivity. It is rather the mechanism which Americans use to deal with difficulty and disappointment. They return to first principles, to American traits, to God and to the American Constitution. They use this foundation to gather energy for the next chapter of their history. Understanding the meaning of this American trait is essential to understanding how to work with the United States.

At the same time, this "virtual" national identity as I have described leads to special characteristics often not found in countries with more traditional histories. Some of these are good, such as American pragmatism and fairness. Some are less good, such as conformity, jealousy and irresponsible conspicuous consumption of the world's resources. These too are elements of American society which one must understand if he is to work successfully with the United States.

President Obama thought this attribute of American society was so important to highlight in this period of crisis that he referred to it in his inaugural address:

"We remain a young nation, but in the words of Scripture, the time has come to set aside childish things. The time has come to reaffirm our enduring spirit, to choose our better history, to carry forward that precious gift, that noble idea, passed on from generation to generation: the God-given promise that all are equal, all are free and all deserve a chance to pursue their full measure of happiness."

"Childish things" is a reference to First Corinthians chapter 13, verse 11 which reads: "When I was a child, I spoke as a child, I understood as a child, I thought as a child, but when I became a man, I put away childish things." In a nation of seeming endless riches

and continuous growth, the steady addition of wealth and possessions came almost to be seen as the essence of Americanness. In such a nation, it was a courageous act for a new President to tell his citizens directly and bluntly, in the words of the Bible, that it was time for them to grow up.

Obama's reference has been criticized by supporters of President Bush as an unnecessary rejection of the spirit of the Reagan and Bush years. And they are right, but the Clinton years could be added as well. It is only a short step from conformity of belief to selfishness and jealousy in personal taste and behavior. Such immaturity of character are a traditional weakness of a society which believes its riches are the result of its own efforts and talents.

Leaders and clergymen to this day seek to rally their congregations against the sins of greed and desire. The immaturity of America's ruling classes is a steady theme of political discourse. This tendency became especially strong in period of booming growth such as in the 1980's, the 1920's or the end of the 20th century. Under such conditions, a childishness immaturity creeps into society and government.

The new President undoubtedly had an important purpose in mind as he read this passage of his speech. America has lived too long as a nation which pays no heed to the costs or implications of its actions. A nation who consumes the world's natural wealth, who pushes aside other cultures and who believes that any limitation on personal behavior is anti-American. These are the people who sold, but also who bought sub-prime mortgages, who drive gas guzzling cars and build useless houses on natural land. Obama clearly understands the character of the American people very well. He knows that his country is on the edge of being politically bankrupt and economically insolvent. He knows also that if "childish ways" are not put aside, America can never again be strong.