

REMEMBERING THE FUTURE: IS THERE STILL A WEST?

**SAIS BOLOGNA CENTER 50TH ANNIVERSARY ACADEMIC CONFERENCE
THE JOHNS HOPKINS BOLOGNA CENTER
MAY 13, 2005**

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An anniversary is a good opportunity for the re-emergence of our most enduring memories – those “mystic chords of memories” that link our past and future with a mixture of fable and facts – reality, myths, and even romance.

Memories of students, the romance of what we achieved together, and the facts of what they achieved subsequently; memories of colleagues, some here today, and others long departed, like the founding father of this institution, Charles Grove Haines, whose ambitions for the Bologna Center were never pursued as the expense of the convictions that stood behind his conception of this great institution.

But beyond personal memories of the Center, there are also more relevant memories of Europe, memories that helped us understand what has become of the continent in the context of what it was when we first engaged it, here, in this city; just as back then, we could attempt to “remember” the future ahead with recollections of what we knew or what we had lived during the 50-odd years that had preceded Grove Haines’ inauguration of this institution, and followed the birth of the twentieth century.

Such memories cannot fail to show a personal dimension for they are to be shared by a small band of brothers, who came and, depending on their status, left after a short moment. My own status is geographically and chronologically odd: By birth, I am an “old” European; but by choice I am a young American.

As the end of the West is reported to emerge out of the re-Europeanization of Europe, coupled with a Re-Americanization of America, I am still enough of an old European to be moved by the poignancy of Stefan Zweig’s words: “How many lives must I live,” he wrote while in exile in Brazil in 1944, “what have we not seen, not suffered, not lived through” he asked as he reflected over Europe’s failures, which he no longer had the strength to endure:

- *Fin de siècle* Europe, vibrant and prosperous, ready to spread its dynamism and prosperity to others, on and beyond the continent, but mortally wounded by the war of 1914
- Postwar Europe, overwhelmed by the slaughters committed in its name during “the” war, but unable to bury them at last, before it became
- Interwar Europe, seized by Evil, torn by its passions, devoured by its thirst for revenge, betrayed by its intellectuals, and ready to fall again in the abyss that it had dug for itself

There was a tragic reality to Europe's collapse.

"We were born at the beginning of the First World War," wrote Albert Camus of the postwar generation that first conceived and inhabited this institution. "As adolescents we had the crisis of 1929; at twenty, Hitler... Then came the Ethiopian war, the civil war in Spain and Munich... These were the foundations of our education.... Born and bred in such a world, what did we believe in? Nothing."

But it is out of the ruins accumulated during these many desperate lives that the French humanist imagined a renaissance—the evocation of Sisyphus pursuing his mythical climb uphill because of his invincible hope that it would ultimately succeed, thus enabling him to die exhausted but happy.

Admittedly, Europe still had its share of dying and killing during the second half of the century. But entering a new century, the 21st of its kind, Zweig, too, could die happy because he could see that Europe's long and brutal struggle uphill may be ending at last.

Yes, I am still enough of an old European to remember all that, what I learned as well as what I lived during the past 60-odd years. But I have acquired enough American-ness over the past 40-odd years to become a young American who remembers the role played by the United States in helping Europe achieve its third territorial revolution in half-a-millennium: past the long forgotten city states, beyond the worn-out nation-states, and onward to a new territorial breed known as member states – odd political units that have abandoned much of their sovereign "I" in order to abide by the collective discipline of an elusive institutional "We".

Historians will be—and some are already—in awe of that transformation. And it is that transformation which, to my mind, is the most endearing valuable achievement we share today. It is one we, Americans and Europeans, share because while the integration of Europe was a European idea, it was also an idea that only American power and leadership could help launch after 1945, actively sustain during the Cold War, and continue to endorse as a whole and united community after that.

But the idea of an ever closer European Union is also, in a deeper sense, an American idea because this is, after all, the idea that shaped the birth of the "more perfect union" in the United States: At last, 3 to 500 million Europeans are doing in their own habitat what 300 to 500,000 other Europeans started on American soil over 225 years ago.

Admittedly, the calendar for the affirmation of the idea of a European union is not the same as it was for the American union. But the overall goal, which aims at a consolidation of an ill-defined territorial space—geographic, political, religious, or cultural—is similar.

The distant and converging parallelism of the histories of these two unions, one that wanted to be "more perfect" and the other that hoped to be "ever closer," is striking.

In the midst of a politically difficult debate over its constitutional treaty, the history of Europe stands today past the Articles of Confederation drafted in 1776-1777, but before the federal constitution drafted a decade later. Faced with unresolved questions over the treatment of its Muslim minorities, Europe stands past the Civil War of the 1860s but before the Civil Rights debate waged and won a century later. And, as it struggles with the finality of its enlargement especially in Turkey, Europe strangely echoes the passionate cultural debates that defined the final enlargement of the American Union, from Utah in 1896 to New Mexico fifteen years later.

Stefan Zweig could die happy today. “Happiness” in this case does not mean a Europe whose so-called “finality” produces a genuine and sovereign super state, either as a matter of fact (territory, population, government, and army) or as a state of mind (loyalty, identity, values, and history).

And irrespective of the anxieties of the moment, today’s successor generations find more to believe in than Camus’s own postwar generation. For, if there is one conclusion that is so final as to be irreversible it is that there is now in much of the continent a civilian space within which force can no longer be used by one state against another, or by any government over its people.

For now at last, now at least, Europe can live a peace that is neither the imperial peace of the bullies, nor the painful peace of the braves, but a peace of contentment and integration, which makes a return to past conflicts simply unthinkable because it is beyond imagination.

Surprisingly, there are some who deplore this transformation. As they view this new Europe, *à l’américaine*, they remember their fading nation-states with an emotion that cannot be felt for this institutional beast, called the union, to which they belong, and this cultural quagmire, called American-ness, into which the union is allegedly sinking them and out of which they reportedly want to emerge.

I understand the emotion. The “princess” imagined in de Gaulle’s “fairy tale” was specifically French, but there were other princesses and other tales imagined elsewhere with comparable love and passion. Every one of these princesses had a personality and a character shaped by the idea citizens had of their nation’s history and traditions. The greatness produced by each European state was but one small fraction of the greatness produced by all of them—the literature, the music, the painting, the architecture, the languages, and much, much more – including even the politics.

Where have all the Spinellis, the Monnets, the Spaaks, the Adenauers gone—and yes, where, too, are those in the United States who understand so very well the values and the anxieties and the dreams that shaped the actions and the decisions of these good Europeans – where are they all? The Zweigs, the Camus’, the Silones – Are they all gone?

Now, Europe's history is found elsewhere: past Britain, France, Germany or any other part of the Old World, it is reconstructed instead around the more recent history of an American presence that Europeans seem to simultaneously resent, welcome, resist, and invite.

As old Europe is *passé*, America seems to be emerging as its most likely future. Not so much America as a caricature of America – an imperial America that is said to enjoy the idea of going to war, destroying the environment, imposing a death penalty on some of its flawed citizens, ignoring international treaties, bringing religion into politics – in short, an America that would be about to launch a crusade against most of the values Europeans spent their tragic history discovering.

The experience is odd, and possibly schizophrenic. Even as America reminds Europe of the dark angels of its own past, Europe introduces America to the somber demons of its own future. Even while Europeans become more American each day, they spend more time looking for ways to complain about America for what it does, and Americans for what they are, and both for what they have become. But even these complaints cannot prevent a cultural assimilation across the Atlantic – a synthesis, if you will, of what we both have become relative to what we used to be.

“Are there common experiences and traditions that are the basis in every European citizen of an awareness of a political destiny which we have experienced together and which we could fashion in the future?” asked Jurgen Habermas and Jacques Derrida, when reflecting about the “political profile” of Europe for the new century. Their point was to argue on behalf of a Europe that cannot be Europe without more distance from America—meaning, unless it does a great deal of cultural cleansing that would free the Europeans from the alleged pollution that has drifted across the Atlantic over the years. Paradoxically, however, the European profile they drew points to the idea that half of America still has of itself: the embodiment of a “civilizing process” that pursues “an ethos of solidarity seeking equal rights for all” on behalf of a “Kantian belief” in a global village and a collective “will [to] correct the failings of the market.”

Claims of a re-Europeanization of Europe and a re-Americanization of America by pointing to the societal drift that began to escalate in early 2001, fail the tests of our recent history, when the strategic need for convergence overcame our cultural differences, and when those cultural differences were progressively overcome by the facts of that strategic convergence.

Sixty years into the recasting of Europe *à l'américaine*, but also sixty years into the rebirth of America as a power in Europe it is good to remember what it was like then, as a retroactive perspective on what it is like now. “The American traveler ... comes to a Europe which is more foreign to Americans today than it has ever been in all our history,” wrote Theodore White shortly after World War II. And White added, “This separation of European and American civilizations happens, moreover, at a moment when America is finally more intimately involved in European affairs than ever before in our national history.”

Then, our respective identities were so distant as to limit our common vision to a vague awareness of our shared failure during the prewar years, and to reduce our joint commitment to not repeating the mistakes that had prompted such failures. Compared to those days of superficial closeness, when America was indeed American and Europe European, we now stand as a community of states that have never been as close, as similar, as compatible, and as intimate. The over there of yesteryears has moved over here.

Since 1919, when president Wilson sailed out of New York City to be the first US president to ever visit Europe while in office, since 1955, when president Truman was heroically received in London, for his first stay in Europe since his days as an infantryman during World War I, and since 1962, when president Kennedy reversed the history that had defined America as an extra-European country to reassert that he, too, was a Berliner and, by implication, a European, the gap has been bridged sufficiently to leave travelers who now cross the Ocean moving from one family residence to another rather than from one civilization to another alien planet.

Admittedly, unfolding demographic changes, combined with the cultural consequences they entail, may loosen this intimacy, and create enough “metamorphosis” on each side of the Atlantic, as well as within Europe, to end the synthesis we have lived or observed or uncovered over the past 50 years.

But that is hardly a reality yet, and pending more evidence to the contrary, the common Euro-Atlantic home that has been built over the past several decades is still the centerpiece of the global order we seek on behalf of our overlapping interests, compatible values, and shared goals.

Overlapping, Compatible, and shared, I said, rather than common—let alone single—or even converging: Certainly there are differences, but these differences make little difference, except for the internal political debates to which they are linked in the United States and in every European state.

Indeed, if issues like the treatment of minorities, the environment, religiosity, the death sentence, the treatment of the old, and so forth, were to define the terms of Europe’s separation from America, or America from Europe, about half of all Americans would be moving back to Europe as anti-Americans, and a substantial fraction of all Europeans would be moving on to America as anti-European. In other words, past the caricatures of the moment, differences within Europe and within America over most societal issues are on the whole no less significant than differences between America and Europe.

And instead of seeking its identity in opposition to America—a cultural third way away from “the extreme individualism of America and the extreme collectivism of Asia”—Europe should debate its identity relative to its own transformation. Where de Gaulle, for example, used to boast of a “France that cannot be France without grandeur,” More modest French claims now speak of a “France that cannot be France without Europe,” as

President Mitterrand liked to say, with a passion that was shared by his counterpart in Germany, Helmut Kohl (and silently acknowledged elsewhere).

The paradox, then, is that the states of Europe can build the “Europe” they need only by being less European and becoming instead more like “a certain idea” of the United States of America. This would close the circle that started in the eighteenth century when Europe was left behind as the central dimension of America’s past, and would now end with America as a defining reference for Europe’s future.

Admittedly, a call for more integration within Europe and across the Atlantic will be heard with some anxiety in Europe and some wariness in the United States: the purpose is understood, but the commitment may be resisted, as was seen during the transatlantic crisis of the past few years, and as is now seen during the European debates over the constitutional treaty. But if not integration in the EU, what else; if not with each other, with whom; if not now, when?

Better to set America’s alarm clock at half before Europe, and Europe’s clock to half past America—early enough, that is, for each side of the Atlantic to wake up to the institutional reality of a Euro-Atlantic West that was launched after World War II, unfinished but usable, separately weak in many areas but collectively powerful in all, and separated from each other by their memories but no longer separable by their aspirations.

Some will say—What’s the rush? But as learned many times over the past two decades—most recently on September 11, 2001—even the long term is finite. As sudden and unpredictable events force history to leap forward in unexpected directions, opportunities that are spurned in the short term may never reappear.

America and Europe have many good reasons to be exasperated with, and occasionally fearful of, each other. They also have many convincing reasons for feeling distinct from each other as they desperately insist that one West is not enough to accommodate the many differences that separate us. But neither America nor Europe wants or can afford a separation, let alone a divorce, because both know that life without the other would be less safe, less affluent, and ultimately less satisfying.