

# Still the Exceptional Nation?

At the dawn of a new century, the United States finds itself in a position of surprising dominance around the world. It has been a triumph of ideas and values perhaps even more than of power, and the victory has critics worrying about the homogenizing effects on the world. But what, a noted scholar asks, about the effects on America?

*by Seymour Martin Lipset*

**W**as Karl Marx right? More than 100 years ago, he declared in *Capital* that “the country that is the most developed shows to the less developed the image of their future,” and his early followers had little doubt that the United States was that most developed harbinger country. “Americans will be the first to usher in a Socialist republic,” declared the German Social Democrat August Bebel in 1907—even though the American Socialist Party was faring miserably at the polls while his own party held many seats in the Reichstag. Only after the Russian Revolution in 1917 did the Left and its liberal sympathizers begin to look elsewhere for a vision of the future. Now Europe set the standard and America followed—all too sluggishly, in the minds of many.

How could the world’s most advanced capitalist society also be the most impervious to the socialist idea? Even the Great Depression failed to alter its course—America’s minuscule Socialist and Communist par-

ties emerged from the 1930s with even less support than they had enjoyed at the beginning of the decade. The American experience cast doubt on the inner logic of historical materialism, the essential Marxist doctrine which holds that the shape of a nation's culture and politics is determined by underlying economic and technological forces. The question engaged the attention of many socialists, as well as Lenin and Trotsky; Stalin attended a special commission of the Communist International on "the American Question."

What was a source of perplexity to some was, of course, a source of pride to others. To scholars, it was a phenomenon in need of explanation. Out of this puzzlement came the rebirth of the idea of "American exceptionalism," a concept first developed by Alexis de Tocqueville in *Democracy in America* (1835–40). The young Frenchman wrote that the United States, the lone successful democracy of his time, differed from all the European nations in lacking a feudal past and in being more socially egalitarian, more meritocratic, more individualistic, more rights-oriented, and more religious. These American tendencies were reinforced by the country's religious commitment to the "nonconformist," largely congregationally organized Protestant sects, which emphasized the individual's personal relationship with God, a relationship that was not mediated by state-supported, hierarchically organized churches of the kind that prevailed in Europe.

In 19th-century America, the ideology of the American Revolution was transformed into an all-encompassing liberalism stressing liberty, antistatism, and individualism. In Europe, a dominant conservatism was wedded to the state—it was conservatives such as Britain's Benjamin Disraeli, for example, who invented the welfare state—and it naturally gave birth to state-centered opposition, social democracy. Because its liberal ideology stifled the emergence of a state-centered opposition, the United States became an anomaly.

**T**oday, however, the United States once again finds itself the apparent image of the future. Not only is it the world's sole superpower and its economic colossus, but it seems to be pointing the way toward the political future. The American political system, long considered an aberration because its two main parties embrace liberal capitalism, now looks like the model for the developed world.

Nothing symbolizes this change more dramatically than the political pep rally cum summit meeting that brought four social democratic heads of government to Washington last April under the auspices of

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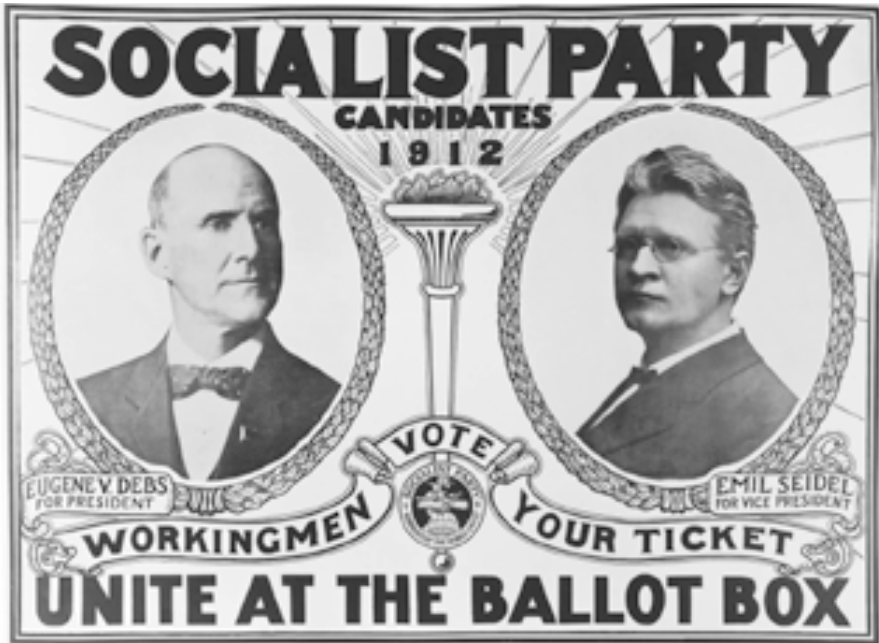


*Groping for a Third Way: D'Alema (left), Kok, Clinton, Blair, and Schröder in April 1999. Clinton, however, was reminded that the others remain members of the Socialist International.*

America's centrist Democratic Leadership Council. Britain's Tony Blair, Germany's Gerhard Schröder, the Netherlands' Wim Kok, and Italy's Massimo D'Alema did not come to press the cause of democratic socialism on their backward cousins across the Atlantic. They wanted to join with Democrat Bill Clinton in affirming what they called the Third Way. And they have done so more than once, meeting most recently in Florence last November, where they were joined by Brazil's Fernando Henrique Cardoso. These putative social democratic leaders, as *Washington Post* columnist E. J. Dionne notes, "accept capitalism as a given, but promise to do something about its inequalities and uncertainties. They talk not of 'socialism' but of 'community,' not of 'collectivism' but of 'solidarity.'" They sound, in other words, very much like America's New Democrats.

All of this suggests that Marx may have been right: the development of an economically and technologically advanced society follows a certain logic, and the United States shows where that logic leads—even if it is not to socialism. But if this is true, will it make sense any longer to speak of American exceptionalism? Will the political cultures of other advanced societies increasingly converge with that of the United States?

**T**he change in the character of Europe's political parties largely reflects the remaking of Europe's economic and class structures along American lines. The European emphasis on *stände*, or fixed, explicitly hierarchical social classes rooted in a feudal and monarchical past, is increasingly a thing of the past. Growing economic productivity is opening access to everything from clothes, cars,



*No thanks: in the election of 1912, a high water mark of America's Socialist Party, Socialist presidential candidate Eugene V. Debs won only six percent of the popular vote.*

and other consumer goods to advanced schooling, powerfully muting the “lifestyle” differences, including accents and dress, that traditionally separated Europe’s social classes. The new economic order has been accompanied by demographic shifts, notably a drastic decline in birthrates and an extension of life spans, that have confronted all the developed nations with a common dilemma: raise taxes significantly to pay for more social security, health care, welfare, and other expensive government services, or find ways to cut spending.

**T**he United States has led the economic transformation, shifting sharply away from the old industrial economy built on manual labor, a process that was especially agonizing during the 1970s and ’80s. The old economy of General Motors, U.S. Steel, and Standard Oil has given way to the economy of Microsoft, Citigroup—and McDonald’s. The proportion of workers employed in manufacturing dropped from 26 percent in 1960 to 16 percent in 1996. In the United Kingdom, manufacturing employment declined from 36 percent of the total to 19 percent, a pattern that prevails from Sweden (with a drop from 32 to 19 percent) to Australia (from 26 to 13.5 percent).

The Old World societies are also following the American lead away from class awareness and organization. Union membership, for example, is declining almost everywhere. Between 1985 and 1995, the proportion of the American labor force carrying a union card fell by 21 percent. Today, only 14 percent of all employed Americans—and only 10 percent of those in the private sector—belong to unions. The propor-

tional losses in France and Britain have been even greater, 37 percent and 28 percent, respectively. In Germany, the decline is a more modest 18 percent.

During the post–World War II era, the distribution of income and occupational skills in Europe has reshaped itself to fit American contours. It has changed from something best illustrated by a pyramidal shape, enlarging toward the bottom, to one better illustrated by a diamond, widest in the middle. The traditional working class, in other words, is shrinking. The middle class is growing, creating solidly bourgeois societies in Europe. Political parties on the left now have little choice but to appeal more to the growing middle strata than to their traditional constituencies, industrial workers and the poor.

Call it what you will — “postindustrial society,” “postmaterialism,” or the “scientific-technological revolution” — the changing cultures of the emerging societies closely fit the Marxian causal model. The political and cultural “superstructures” are determined, as sociologist Daniel Bell has noted, by the technological structures and the distribution of economic classes.

**M**any of the trends that Marx anticipated, especially a steady increase in the size of the industrial proletariat, have not occurred. Throughout the industrialized world, job growth is concentrated in the technological and service occupations. College enrollments have swelled, and the degree-bearing population has grown enormously. Alain Touraine, a leading French sociologist and leftist intellectual, writes: “If property was the criterion of membership in the former dominant class, the new dominant class is defined by knowledge and a certain level of education.”

With their roots in the university and the scientific and technological worlds, and with a heavy representation in the public sector, the professions, and the industries spawned by computers, the new workers have developed their own distinctive values. Political scientist Ronald Inglehart of the University of Michigan, pointing as well to the influence of a half-century of affluence, argues that these changes have spawned a new set of “postmaterialist” values. An affluent, better-educated citizenry has shifted its political attention away from bread-and-butter economic issues to new concerns: the environment, health, the quality of education, the culture, equality for women and minorities, the extension of democratization and freedom at home and abroad, and last, but far from least, the definition of a more permissive (and highly controversial) morality.

The United States has also been in the forefront of the postmaterialist new politics, quickly exporting the latest concerns of Berkeley, Madison, and other university towns to Paris and Berlin. It gave birth to all the major successful modern movements for egalitarian social change and for improving the quality of life — feminism, environmentalism, civil rights for minorities, and gay rights — just as it did the democratic

revolutions of the 19th century. Writing in 1971, as the new politics was beginning to emerge, the French political analyst Jean-François Revel observed in *Without Marx or Jesus* that the “revolutionary stirrings have had their origin in the United States.” The Continent’s “dissenters . . . are the disciples of the American movements.”

**M**any political analysts here and abroad still do not fully appreciate the extent to which the Left’s new course, its centrist “Third Way,” is also the product of common developments throughout the economically advanced democracies rather than events or leaders peculiar to each country. And the collapse of communism, though a heavy blow to the socialist idea, was not the decisive factor. The earliest signs of change came well before anyone dreamed that the Berlin Wall would not survive the millennium. During the 1980s, the Labor parties of Australia and New Zealand cut income taxes, pursued economic deregulation, and privatized important industries. In 1983, the Australian party entered into an accord with the trade unions that resulted, as then-prime minister Robert Hawke emphasized, in a reduction in workers’ real wages of at least one percent in each of the eight years that he was head of the government. Hawke declared in 1989 that “the move in the share of the national income from wages toward profits . . . has enabled us to grow.”

The New Zealand story is similar. After returning to power under Prime Minister David Lange in 1984, the Labor Party followed what has been described as the most Thatcherite policy among Western governments, including the government of British prime minister Margaret Thatcher itself. It ended “the tradition of taxation according to ability to pay,” dismantled the welfare state, and privatized many state enterprises. Lange, complained one critic, believed that “social democrats must accept the existence of economic inequality because it is the engine which drives the economy.”

But the pivotal event in this late-20th century political transition was the British election of 1997 (on May Day, ironically), which the Labor Party won by an overwhelming margin after it had abandoned its historic emphasis on public ownership and class politics. Tony Blair’s victory marked the end of a century of socialist efforts to eliminate private ownership of the economy in Europe. As a London investment banker observed, “We have got fundamentally two parties now far more like the Democrats and Republicans, instead of socialists and capitalists.”

**B**lair has deliberately followed the free-market, smaller-government policies of President Clinton. It was Blair, then Britain’s opposition leader, who in 1995 first uttered the words, “The era of big government is over,” which became the sentence of the decade when Clinton repeated them a few months later. Blair’s “New Labor” no longer automatically takes the side of trade unions. Organized labor, he emphasizes, must cooperate “with management to

make sure British industry is competitive.” Blair promised in a 1997 interview that his administration would “leave British law the most restrictive on trade unionism in the Western world.”

One of Blair’s first actions after taking office was to shift authority over monetary policy and interest rates from the Treasury to the Bank of England, thereby reducing the power of the party controlling the government to affect the economy. Another initiative, launched after his first postelection meeting with Bill Clinton, was a welfare reform designed to sharply reduce the number of Britons on the dole by pressing single mothers to take paying jobs. Blair promised to “be tough on the long-term unemployed who refuse jobs.” In Parliament, he declared that “for millions, the welfare state denies rather than provides opportunity.” Not surprisingly, the Iron Lady found much to approve of in Blair’s New Labor. “Britain will be safe in the hands of Mr. Blair,” Baroness Thatcher declared.

**A**t his jubilant meeting with Clinton, held barely a month after Labor’s triumph in the British elections, Blair noted that both prefer “reason to doctrine” and are “indifferent to ideology.” Clinton and Blair agreed that the “progressive parties of today are the parties of fiscal responsibility and prudence.” The two leaders called for partnership with business to create jobs, replacing the “old battles between state and market.”

The story is much the same among left parties outside the English-speaking world. The Swedish Social Democrats, who held office with only two interludes out of power (1976–82 and 1991–98) from the early 1930s on, have also reversed course. The Social Democratic finance minister during most of the 1980s, Kjell-Olof Feldt, sharply reduced the progressivity of his country’s tax system, and emphasized the necessity of “accepting private ownership, the profit motive, and differences of income and wealth.” Feldt wrote: “The market economy’s facility for change and development and therefore economic growth has done more to eliminate poverty” and “the exploitation of the working class” than any political intervention in the market’s system of distribution.

Across the Oeresund, the Danish Social Democratic government has also been speaking in terms that no American Republican could reject. In Spain, before he left office in 1996, Socialist prime minister Felipe Gonzalez converted his party—which was Marxist in its initial post-Franco phase—to support of privatization, the free market, and the North Atlantic Treaty Organization. Echoing Winston Churchill, Gonzalez argued that a competitive free-market economy is marked by greed, corruption, and the exploitation of the weak by the strong—but is also “the least-bad economic system in existence.” In Portugal, the constitution of 1976, adopted after the Socialist-led democratic revolution that overthrew Antonio Salazar’s long dictatorship, proclaimed that the large number of state-owned companies were “irreversible conquests of the working classes.” But the Socialist government elected in January

1996 has enthusiastically pursued privatization and other market-oriented policies.

Germany is home to the first major Marxist party in the world, the Social Democratic Party (SPD), founded in 1875. The party rejected Marxism in the late 1950s but remained socialist. Yet as early as 1976, Social Democratic chancellor Helmut Schmidt was arguing that the interests of workers required expanding profits. “The profits of enterprises today,” he declared, “are the investments of tomorrow, and the investments of tomorrow are the employment of the day after.”



*Experimental and provoking diverse reactions, the new dome of Berlin's Reichstag is an apt symbol of the New Europe.*

ments of tomorrow, and the investments of tomorrow are the employment of the day after.”

The chancellor elected in 1998, Gerhard Schröder, continues in this tradition. He sees the SPD as part of a “New Middle” rather than the Left. John Vinocur of the *International Herald-Tribune* notes that the New Middle “is a place where words like ‘risk,’ ‘entrepreneurial spirit,’ and ‘flexible labor markets’ coincide with expressions of allegiance to social justice and fair income distribution.” Schröder’s first finance minister, Oskar Lafontaine, clung to more tradi-

tional SPD positions and soon found himself looking for work.

Schröder has promised to improve the German economy, reducing its 10 percent unemployment rate by lowering “prohibitive labor costs” imposed by union contracts and “providing incentives for new capital investment.” He noted in the campaign that the SPD is “breaking with . . . statist social democratic attitudes . . . we’ve understood that the omnipotent and interventionist state doesn’t have its place in the current circumstances.” Thus far, however, he has failed to improve the economy.



The editors of the *Economist*, noting a few years ago that in most Western countries “the left keeps on moving right,” summed up the situation elsewhere in Europe: “In Central Europe, ex-Communists running Poland and Hungary . . . have been boldly trying to reinvent their states on a basis of free markets and respect for private property. The shift of gravity within the left-wing parties in the south has been no less striking. In Spain, Portugal, Italy, and Greece the left has moved sharply to the right.”

**T**here are two interesting European exceptions to the retreat from socialism. One is Norway, whose abundant North Sea oil revenues make it easy to underwrite an expansive welfare state. The other is France. The French Left operates in a society where *dirigisme*, the concept of a strong directing state, has been as powerful a cultural organizing principle as antistatism has been in the United States—producing a French “uniqueness” that may be the counterpoint to American exceptionalism.

France is that rare country where a solid majority of citizens still tell pollsters that the word *bureaucrat* has a positive connotation, and that they would like their children to work for the government. The Right and Left both approve of a strong state, a tradition going back to the monarchy, the empire, and the Revolution. While the Socialists, who resumed power following France’s 1997 parliamentary elections, have instituted some modest market-oriented reforms, they are stuck in a curious position. As journalist Roger Cohen observes, “The Gaullist attachment to the state and rejection of market reform [has] encouraged the Socialists to keep further to the left, to distinguish themselves.” At the Third Way summit in Florence last November, French prime minister Lionel Jospin pointedly turned his back when Clinton spoke, facing what the *New York Times* described as a “somewhat bemused” Gerhard Schröder.

Curiously, the country most often cited as a model by European social democrats is the Netherlands, once considered a model nanny state. With an unemployment rate of about three percent, far below those of the major Continental economies (and a point below the U.S. rate), and rapid economic growth, the Dutch under a government headed by a former union leader, Wim Kok of the Labor Party, have accepted wholesale changes. Unemployment benefits have been cut, while the rules for sick and disability pay have been tightened. Rules for hiring and firing and for opening new businesses have been eased. Social security taxes have been cut. In a “social pact” comparable to the Australian accord, the unions, then led by Kok, agreed to limit wage increases to two percent per year, in part on the premise that more jobs would be created. One government official says that “the Dutch miracle . . . is that our labor unions could be convinced to rally around a free market economy.”

The great reversal that has put the politically “backward” United States at the head of the movement toward a more politically “progres-

sive” future is all the more remarkable for having occurred in the space of only a few years. The Dutch scholar Anton Zijderveld predicts in *The Waning of the Welfare State* (1999) “that most post-welfare state countries in Europe will become more ‘American’ in their social policies . . . and morality.”

The United States clearly is no longer as exceptional politically as it once was. Its political life—dominated by two procapitalist political parties and defined by traditional, moralistic, sectarian religion, classical liberalism (*laissez faire*), and environmentalist and other post-



*These 1950s Welshmen knew exactly where they stood in the class system; their children likely do not.*

materialist tendencies—is setting a model for other developed countries. The convergence has even stripped the United States of its past monopoly on populist politics, the traditional outlet of the discontented and dispossessed in a country without a working-class political party. The latest example is Austria, where parliamentary elections last October catapulted Jorg Haider’s far-right Freedom Party into a new prominence.

**Y**et for all that, the United States remains exceptional in other important ways. It is still an outlier at one end of many international indicators of behavior and values. It is still much less statist and welfare oriented, and its governments (federal and state) tax and spend much less in proportionate terms than European governments. It is the most religious country in Christendom, the only one still strongly influenced by the moralistic and individualistic ethos of Protestant sectarianism. It has higher rates of mobility into elite positions than any other nation. It combines exceptional levels of productivity, income, and wealth with exceptionally low levels of taxation and social spending, and equally exceptional levels of income inequality and poverty.

The United States remains well ahead of other large developed countries in per capita income, retaining the lead it has held since the second half of the 19th century. In 1997, U.S. per capita income (measured in terms of purchasing power parity) was \$28,740. Switzerland was the only developed country to come close, at \$26,320, while Norway (\$23,940), Japan (\$23,400), and Denmark (\$22,740) followed. At the same time, the United States boasts the lowest rate of unemployment in the developed world, about four percent, while Europe has some 20 million out of work, or more than 10 percent of the labor force. Poverty, currently the condition of 13.7 percent of Americans, is more widespread than in Europe, though rates are dropping. (Among African Americans, the poverty rate dropped to 29 percent in 1995, passing below 30 percent for the first time in the nation’s history. Today it stands at 28.4 percent.)

The United States is the only Western country in which government extracts less than 30 percent of the gross domestic product in taxes—it took 28.5 percent in 1996. Spending on social welfare is correspondingly low. One has to go outside the Western world to find societies with a smaller state. The Japanese tax take was a tenth of a percent lower, but among the remaining member states of the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), only Turkey (25.4 percent), South Korea (23.2 percent), and Mexico (16.3 percent) have lower taxation levels.

American exceptionalism is distinctly double-edged. The United States is not as egalitarian in economic terms as the rest of the developed world. It has the highest proportion of nonvoters in national elections, as well the highest rates of violent crime and the biggest prison population (in per capita terms). Thanks to its meritocratic orientation, it is among the leaders in the unequal distribution of income. Gauged by the Gini

coefficient, the social scientist's standard measure of income inequality, the U.S. score of 37.5 is almost 10 percent higher than that of the next closest country (Britain) among the Western democracies, and far above Sweden's 22.2. To put it in simpler terms, the richest 20 percent of Americans have incomes about nine times greater than the poorest 20 percent, while in Japan and Germany the affluent enjoy incomes only four and six times greater, respectively.

Yet because individualism and meritocratic ideals are so deeply ingrained in them, Americans are much less troubled by such differences than Europeans. According to a 1990 study, Americans are more likely to believe that there should be "greater incentives for individual effort," rather than that "incomes should be made more equal." Proportionately fewer Americans (56 percent) agree that "income differences are too large," as compared with Europeans (whose positive responses range from 66 to 86 percent). In a survey reported in 1995, people in six countries were asked: "How would you prefer to be paid—on a fixed salary . . . or mostly on an incentive basis which will allow you to earn more if you accomplished a lot, but may result in less earnings if you don't accomplish enough?" A majority of Americans (53 percent) opted for the incentive plan; the survey's British, French, Spanish, and German respondents chose a fixed salary by margins ranging from 65 to 72 percent.

A 1996 survey shows that a policy that reduces income disparities is supported by less than one-third (28 percent) of Americans, while positive responses elsewhere range from 42 percent in Austria to 82 percent in Italy. The British fall in the middle at 63 percent.

Americans are more likely than Europeans to agree that "large income differences are needed for the country's prosperity." Nearly one-third of Americans surveyed in 1987 justify inequality this way, as compared with an average of 23 percent among seven European countries (Great Britain, Austria, West Germany, Italy, Hungary, Switzerland, and the Netherlands). A 1992 review of American public opinion data over 50 years reports: "Surveys since the 1930s have shown that the explicit idea of income redistributing elicits very limited enthusiasm among the American public. . . . Redistributive fervor was not much apparent even in [the] depression era. Most Americans appear content with the distributional effects of private markets."

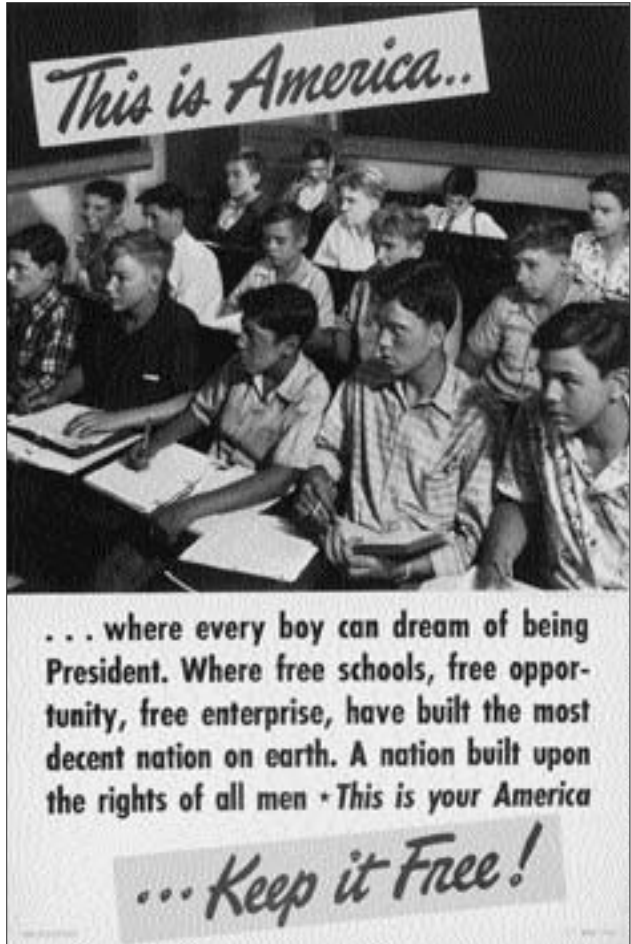
**T**he historian Richard Hofstadter wrote that the 1930s introduced a "social democratic tinge" into the United States for the first time in its history. The Great Depression brought a strong emphasis on planning, on the welfare state, on the role of the government as a major regulatory actor, and even on redistribution of income. The great crisis challenged the historic American national commitment to the assumptions of classical liberalism and *laissez faire*, spawning, among other things, New Deal-inspired policies and a growth in trade union strength. These trends, however, have gradually inverted in the reasonably prosperous half-century since the end of

World War II. The tinge—which never approached the full flush of Europe—has faded.

Despite the European Left's embrace of the free market, European governments are still, by American standards, very deeply involved in the economy and society. The differences stem in part from historical identities and values, in part from institutions that have been established over the last century. Once in place, government policies are defended by those who benefit from them, even as they continue to shape expectations about what government can do. The major European countries provided important social services long before the United States, which did not enact pension, unemployment, or industrial accident insurance until the 1930s. It is the only developed nation that does not have a government-supported, comprehensive medical system, and it is one of the few that do not provide child support to all families.

Today, Americans are still more opposed than Europeans to government involvement in economic affairs, whether through wage and price controls, publicly funded job creation, or the length of the work week.

Nor are they favorably disposed toward government regulation in other realms, such as seat belt laws. Only 23 percent of Americans believe it is government's responsibility "to take care of very poor people who can't take care of themselves," according to a 1998 study by the late public opinion expert Everett Carl Ladd. They are less disposed than Europeans to believe that the state is obligated to supply a job for everyone who wants one, to provide a decent standard of living for the unemployed, or to guarantee a basic income.



A 1942 poster to build wartime morale could still serve as a summary of American beliefs today—just substitute “child” for “boy.”



*Third Way triumphs haven't silenced those who still find U.S.-style democratic capitalism abhorrent.*

The value differences between the United States and Europe are also reflected in attitudes toward social mobility and personal achievement. Americans are more likely than Europeans to see personal effort, hard work, ambition, education, and ability as more important for getting ahead in life than social background. Confronted with the proposition that “what you achieve depends largely on your family background” in a 1990 survey, only 31 percent of Americans agreed, compared with 53 percent of the British, 51 percent of the Austrians, and 63 percent of the Italians. Asked to choose between hard work and “luck and connections” as the most likely route to a better life, 44 percent of Americans pointed to hard work. Only 24 percent of the most like-minded European group, the British, agreed.

**T**he American commitment to meritocracy is also reflected in the fact that Americans are more disposed than Europeans to favor increased spending on education. (And Americans tend to oppose offering help as a “handout” in the form of outright government grants to students, which Europeans back, preferring instead student loans.) Given that education is seen as the key to upward mobility, it is not surprising that the United States has spent proportionally much more public money on education than Europe, while Europe has devoted much more to welfare. The United States has led the world in providing the kinds of general education needed to get ahead. Since the early 19th century, it has been first in the proportion of citizens graduating from public elementary school, then high school, and more recently in the percentages attending college and receiving postgraduate training.

The other developed countries are now rapidly closing the education gap, however. College entry rates increased by more than 25 percent in 16 OECD countries between 1990 and '96, while the rate in the United States remained about the same. This change and others in education suggest that American-style individualism and ambition have

spread to the point where the United States cannot be considered exceptional in these respects.

Does it still make sense to speak of the United States as the exceptional nation? As social democratic parties the world over shift toward the free market, the differences between the United States and other Western democracies may continue to narrow. Yet deeply rooted institutions and values do not easily lose their influence. The Western democracies may now all fit the liberal mold, but liberalism, too, has its divides. Europe still tends toward the economically egalitarian side, with a penchant for active government; Americans prefer a competitive, individualist society with equality of opportunity and effective but weak government.

There is no reason, moreover, to believe that we have seen the end of change—much less the “end of history.” For all its rewards, the free market is not a source of great inspiration. Capitalism does not pledge to eliminate poverty, racism, sexism, pollution, or war. It does not even promise great material rewards to all. Neoconservative thinker Irving Kristol echoes a long line of capitalism’s defenders when he allows that it offers “the least romantic conception of a public order that the human mind has ever conceived.”

It is hard to believe that the West’s now-contented young will not some day hunger again for the “exalted notions” that Aristotle described more than 2,000 years ago. Yet when they do, America will still have an ideological vision, the individualist, achievement-oriented American Creed, with which to motivate its young to challenge reality. The evolving social vision of Europe will necessarily hearken back to the very different ideals of the French Revolution and social democracy.

One does not have to peer far into the future to see that the contest between the forces of change and the defenders of the status quo is not over. In the formerly communist countries of Europe, left and liberal advocates of the free market and democracy confront conservative defenders of the power of state bureaucracies. Elsewhere in Europe, Green parties press the cause of environmentalism and other postmaterialist concerns. And nobody can predict what forces may be put into play by future events, from economic crisis to the rise of China. New movements and ideologies will appear and old ones will be revived. Economic hardship may bolster communitarian efforts to relegitimate the state’s role in attacking social, sexual, and racial inequalities.

Even looking only at what is already in view, the United States still stands out. For instance, in every one of the 13 richest countries in the European Union, Green parties are represented in the national parliament or the country’s delegation to the European Parliament. Greens have recently participated in ruling government coalitions in Belgium, Finland, France, Germany, and Italy. Only the United States lacks even a minimally effective Green party. One of the great puzzles of the 20th century was posed by the title of German sociologist Werner Sombart’s 1906 book, *Why Is There No Socialism in the United States?* The puzzle of the next century may be, Why is there no Green party in the United States? □