

# Lawrence S. Graham

## European – US relations

In a world dominated by the news media and continual crisis, it is more important than ever that we take a balanced perspective on US-European relations. Just as in Europe and elsewhere in the contemporary world, however, a redefinition is underway in how Americans see themselves and their relationship with the outside world that is affecting this relationship. At the core of these tensions is a fact we often overlook: the distinctiveness of the American experience from that of Europe. Who we are as a people, where we are located and how we have gone about constructing our nation has been a constant factor in our national experience which has continued to shape and will reshape how we see ourselves in the international context. Because we are in transition and divided over our role in the world, it is essential to look within to understand how we will act abroad in the years ahead.

First, we have been and we remain a nation of immigrants that has assimilated into our national experience peoples of tremendously different national origins. That definition has been overwhelmingly European centered for the last century and a half. Especially in the last half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century primacy has been given to our European relationship, as a consequence of the Second World War and Cold War. This is no longer the case if you will look at US demographics, at the rapidly changing character of the American economy, and how we are responding to globalization. In the new political, social, and economic alignments emerging in the US, it can no longer be assumed that the US' vital interests are primarily identified with outcomes in Europe. Certainly, the stance taken on the Balkans has reaffirmed a convergence in US and European interest in constraining ethnic violence in southeastern Europe and we have come to see this region as a vital European region in the context of a wider Europe. But with the ending of the Cold War now more than a decade in the past, what warrants recognition is the emergence of the view that the US also has vital national interests elsewhere in the world. These are essentially two: a new awareness that in a world increasingly divided into major economic regions, our economic and strategic base is centered in the Western Hemisphere, espe-

cially in the broader North American region. No less important is Asia, for we are and remain also a Pacific nation, as much as we are an Atlantic nation.

As we enter the 21<sup>st</sup> century, more and more Americans are thinking of themselves in terms of an external world that is no longer Euro-centric, but as participants in a world in which we must secure a solid economic base in the Western Hemisphere and reorient our world view in such a way that we recognize that our vital interests are as much wrapped up in outcomes in Asia as they are in Europe. For, geopolitically we are no longer a people tied primarily to Europe in our origins, but Western Hemisphere centered, as the Hispanic presence in the US rapidly increases and as we consolidate a more competitive regionally based economy. Whatever the outcome in the development of a Western Hemisphere free-trade area is, what is certain is that economic convergence is underway in such a way that our affairs as Americans are increasingly wrapped up with those of Mexico and Canada. Furthermore, the pull of North American markets is having unavoidable effects on Central America and the larger Caribbean region, and as a consequence a much larger North American market is in the making. Equally important, our trade and interest in Asia are increasing rapidly. The outcome is an East Coast America that remains Atlantic in its orientation; a New South (the "Sunbelt") that extends westward from Florida through Texas to California that finds its future imbedded in the circum-Caribbean region, and a West Coast America that sees its opportunities and its future as linked to Asia—with outcomes and developments in China, Japan, Korea, and India as well as Australia and New Zealand that are just as important as those in the UK, France, or Germany.

This new interdependency for the US is one in which we are becoming much more aware of our identity as a country with a diverse people and economic interests that are imbedded as much in the Western Hemisphere and in Asia as they are in Europe. A major reflection of this changing relationship and the new economic, political, and social dynamic is to be seen in our changing patterns of immigration, as confirmed in the last census, and the newer generations of immigrants who are becoming incorporated into American culture. Whereas in the past we were a nation derived essentially from European immigration, today we are a country with a growing Hispanic presence, to such an

extent that in Texas and the border states this newly assimilated Hispanic population is becoming the majority of our population. But this is a new mass immigration that is changing America by the incorporation not just of immigrants from the south, it is also an immigration in which the Asian percentage of our population is rapidly increasing, especially as we continue to undergo a revolution in technology that is linked to the rapid expansion of knowledge-based industries. The greatest response we are finding in the attraction of high tech workers from abroad is coming precisely from the Asian countries, as thousands of Asians are moving into the new jobs and participating in the new wealth created by high technology.

The US in the 21st century thus is going to be more and more a nation with global interest, without primacy being given to any one single world region. More so than ever before, our southern borders and our position within the Americas are being seen as a vital part of our national interests. In the same way, our outward-looking perspectives in trade and national security are becoming much more Pacific oriented. These dimensions, however, are not driven by external events as much as they reflect an interfacing between domestic and external affairs in defining who we are as a people and where our people have come from, how they identify with the American experience, and how they see us participating in the world economy. As a nation formed and shaped by repeated waves of immigration, ours is a national experience involving more and more diversity, a greater multiplicity than ever before of perspectives and concerns, and constant tension between internal and external affairs, as the definition of who the US is as a nation is once again being reshaped as a consequence of continuous immigration and absorption of new and different groups from outside our borders into a cultural synthesis that is continuously changing. Assimilation of new Americans has never been free of conflict and adjustments; hence today as in the past, tensions and conflicts are certain to emerge as Americans whose identity has been defined by our older immigration, which was European, combine and merge with Hispanic Americans, Asian Americans, and Afro-Americans.

Institutional pluralism and the absence of a defined center in US politics, economics, and society is an equally important factor affecting directly the US-European relationship. The division and separation of powers and resistance to concentration of power in

the center is crucial to the American experience. But in a world of instant news reporting and media that search for immediate resolutions of issues and a clear-cut definition of problems, the system of checks and balance on power in the US makes for confusion and misunderstanding. Our political, social, and economic debates have always been transparent, messy, and contentious, and this is truer today than ever before. The definition of our national state is fundamentally different from that dominant in Europe. Institutionally this means, in a way that is frequently disregarded in Europe, that we are a federal presidential republic in which the division of powers between our executives, legislatures, and courts provide a continually changing mosaic in which competing voices and conflicting perspectives are more and more strident, but without rupturing a cultural identity that has never required strong central authority and that resist repeated attempts to concentrate power in the center and in the hands of a limited number of individuals.

Lastly, in a nation in which cultural identity is at the core of who we are as a people and how we assimilate those who have arrived most recently at our shores what is required is far greater attention to cultural policy and new academic and cultural and business partnerships that promote mutual understanding and tolerance for diverse ways of organizing and responding to issues in politics, economics, and society. While in our universities we have a long tradition of international and area studies in which we analyze and process huge amounts of data and information regarding the outside world, through which we attempt to provide a basis from which more informed judgment can be made in government and business regarding our priorities, there is relatively little in-depth analysis in universities abroad and a relatively limited number of individuals and institutes that devote themselves to the analysis of American politics, economics, and society. These aspects require and deserve attention in how we can promote mutual understanding, exchange relationships, and greater appreciation of the distinct bases from which we all operate as diverse nations in a world that is increasingly diverse and yet increasingly drawn together by issues and agendas that transcend our national boundaries and the continents where we reside.