

EUROPE'S CONTRIBUTION TO  
AMERICAN CIVILIZATION

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Please forgive me for committing heresy by suggesting that the theme of this convocation, "Europe's Contribution to American Civilization", is a contradictio in re. May I go even further and say that this theme can only be explained by the unjustified inferiority complex of Americans and the oft-encountered superiority feeling of Europeans.

Concerning this point, I am ignoring for the moment what would have been left of Europe and its culture after the Second World War had not the United States mounted the barricades for liberty, Justice, and, above all, the freedom of the individual. I'm also not taking into consideration what would have happened to Germany had not the Americans - through the Marshall Plan and other aid - helped Germany to achieve its present economic and political position.

Who, I should like to pose the question: Who are the Americans and where do they come from? The answer is to remind ourselves that most Americans are committed to Christian principles - regardless of their attitude towards any of the formal religions - and that they came from Europe at one time or another. Although it is easy to shake the dust of Europe from one's feet, it is impossible to give up one's European culture or, better said, one's origin or provenance. The "European" stamp clings just as firmly to those who know nothing about Europe or don't want to know. In fact, the chances of eliminating that stamp are about as likely as

getting rid of one's shadow.

Even though the paintings of the old masters, the cathedrals and the castles are physically located in the old world, our history and our tradition are also America's. The American citizen who visits Europe is actually returning to his homeland and the European who comes to America comes to a land where his ancestors have fashioned a new home. These close ties have been enormously strengthened through technical advances in communications and transportation; Oceans have become lakes; seas have become ponds; the Great Powers of yesterday have become the little nations of today. In fact, the once-famous "Concert of Great Powers" - a concept which played such an important role in politics and historical writing over past centuries - has been dissolved by the two World Powers whose capitals are in Washington and Moscow. Whether or not Peking will become a third World Power remains to be seen.

Just as the focal point of the European novel has shifted to the new world, so too has the center of European power resettled in the United States. It is no accident that Europe's freedom depends upon America, whose independence, likewise, would be equally impossible without Europe.

This brings us to the core of our theme - the interdependence, interrelationship, and mutual influences between Europe and the United States. Americans are absolutely right in viewing Europe as an entity. Indeed, the many small countries of Europe complement each other culturally and economically, depend upon one another, nurture one another, and are different from one another only in nuances.

Nevertheless, my task will be to review the history of the relation between Germany and America with special

reference to German influence on the United States. To do this justice would take an encyclopedia, so in this short lecture I can only condense, simplify and confine myself to a few special points.

Let me begin with the observation that the most frequently spoken foreign language in the U.S. is German. At the same time, let me refute the myth often heard in Germany, that the U.S. Congress once rejected the adoption of German as the national language by a one-vote majority. But there was the so-called German belt in the mid-West where so much German was spoken that in the Ohio legislature of 1933 Dr. Kreider, the State Representative, gave his speech in German.

Many similar incidents could be told, but they are irrelevant to our theme. It is interesting, however, to note that Benjamin Franklin was the first publisher in 1732 of a German-language newspaper, the "Philadelphische Zeitung", and that he published German books for 30 years.

It's noteworthy that almost all the Germans who settled here became known for their readiness to defend freedom and democracy. A few days after arriving at Portsmouth in December 1777, General von Steuben wrote to the Continental Congress: "My only aspiration in serving as a volunteer at the risk of my life is that one day I will have the honor of finding my name among those who defended your liberty".

To clarify the interdependence of German-American influence may I select three dates from history? The years are 1648, 1848 and 1948.

The year 1648 ended the Thirty Years' War with the

partition of Germany, whose 17 million population was decimated to 6 million through war, famine, and pestilence. One year later, the absolute monarch Charles I was executed in England and a Republic was proclaimed which lasted for 11 years. I mention this to point out that in the whole of German history, there is not a single case of regicide, which otherwise occurred in every other European nation.

It was in 1648 also that René Descartes was becoming famous; he was already a guest of Queen Christine of Sweden. Germany, too, had its poet, Grimmelshausen, who became known throughout the world for a novel which grew out of the Thirty Years' War called "Der abenteuerliche Simplicissimus" (the Adventurous Know-Nothing). His gravestone epitaph, which he composed himself, reveals something of the people who lived in the center of Europe - culturally enriched but buffeted from all sides, hemmed in and threatened by many powers - a people out of whose instability and restlessness much would be achieved and much squandered.

"Deutsch Volk belogen and betrogen  
Im Streit um hohes Ideal  
Durch Not und Elend durchgezogen  
Aus Wunden blutend ohne Zahl  
Einfältigen Herzens, tief verwildert,  
Berührt doch von der Muse Kuss  
Deutsch Volk du warst, den er geschildert,  
der arme Simplicissimus."

"You, German people, lied to and betrayed  
When fighting for a high ideal;  
Who through misery and hardship strayed  
Blood from countless wounds you feel.  
Of simple heart grown savage and unruly:  
Yet brushed were you by the Muse's kiss  
You German folk, whom he depicted truly,  
The poor Simplicissimus."

It was an era - 1648 - which drove many Germans to the New World. The German provinces paid little heed to freedom of the individual. The people were the pawns of the princes. To be sure, the Peasant War of 1524 revealed the restlessness of the oppressed masses, as Florian Geyer, the Knight, entered the pages of history as a freedom hero, while the words of Martin Luther resounded far and wide, and Thomas Muenzer mingled revolutionary social ideas with religious concepts and founded the sect of the Second Baptism.

The name Martin Luther is in itself reason enough to write an entire book about German influence on America. German Christian communities and their many sects which fled from the intolerance of the old homeland played a significant part in the colonization of America. They exulted in the freedoms of the New World, while at home oppression still held away and liberation lay a long way off.

At first, this undercurrent affected only the peasants, but there followed the demands of a liberal and freedom-seeking citizenry and finally came the socialists, nurtured by the working class of an evolving industrial society. The Germans are certainly a strange people; they took part in the holy Roman Empire of Charlemagne as well as the Reformation, in the birth of liberalism as well as Marxism (Karl Marx, after all, was born in the Catholic city of Trier). And finally, they presented to the world the hypertrophy of nationalism. As did other peoples, they went down the inevitable path described by Grillparzer, "from humanity by way of nationalism to bestiality".

In 1803, Ernst Moritz Arndt, whose father had only been released from bondage by the Duke of the principality of

Ruegen, published a book called "Versuch einer Geschichte der Leibeigenschaft in Pommern" ("An Essay on the History of Bondage in Pommerania"). He used as his theme a quotation from Emperor Tiberius: "In a free state, the tongue and the spirit must be free".

It might be argued that Germany never suffered serfdom in the Russian sense, and one might incline rather to speak of bondage. This is, of course, quibbling and only interesting to legal historians. In any case, Germans were oppressed and whipped. As Ernst Moritz Arndt put it: "I wish that I did not have to contradict the assertion that bondage grew milder from century to century". And elsewhere he said of serfs: "I know of some heart-warming examples of kindness but I also know stories of brutality and terror which would shock the human heart if they were told". In this connection, he made an exception of "subjects of the Church", saying that "there was a good life under the "episcopal staff".

At other times, Arndt speaks of "the holy idea of a legal popularly-supported constitution... the basis of which was provided only after the emergence of the middle class and the municipal administrations in the cities". Arndt's tract was a courageous and articulate trumpet call for the liberation of the peasants - a development which, however, lay far in the future.

At this same time, John Quincy Adams, who was later to become the sixth President of the United States, was American Ambassador (1779-1801) to the court of the Prussian king. After his return, he advocated the teaching of German and German literature in the United States. He had, in the meantime, himself translated Wieland's Oberon and had

written 44 highly interesting letters about Germany. And all this he did some 15 years before Madame de Stael wrote her famous book, "De l'Allemagne".

Adams was not the only American President to be stimulated by contact with the Germans. For example, Jefferson's ideas on education - which were embodied in the action wherein the Virginia legislature founded the University of Virginia in 1819, - had been enriched by the German scholar Alexander von Humboldt. Humboldt was Jefferson's guest in Washington and out of this association there grew a long exchange of correspondence as well as books.

What significance can we attach to the fact that no less a figure than Edgar Allan Poe assembled his theoretical concepts in a book called "Eureka", which he dedicated to Alexander von Humboldt? Humboldt was a progressive and social-minded person for whom tolerance was a serious matter, since he, anything but a Socialist, saw to it that Ferdinand Lasalle, the leading figure in the socialist movement, was permitted to settle in Berlin. For this a great deal of courage was needed after the Revolution of 1848 failed, (when, I ask, did revolution not fail in Germany?) Indeed, doubt and timidity caused the failure of the 1848 Revolution, an attempt to exert middle class, liberal influences on the state fully 72 years after the American Declaration of Independence stated: "We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal and that they are endowed by their creator with certain inalienable rights, among them life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness".

The German freedom fighters of 1848 who were hounded by the princes and their police after the failure of the revolution

*sought & found refuge* ↗

in America, the land of freedom. Many of them achieved prominence here and a full account of their accomplishments would fill many pages. One who held to his principals and became the best known was Carl Schurz. He could conceive of human progress only in terms of a democratic system. He held that an uninterrupted rise in the economic and intellectual level of all the strata of the population through reform - before it could be forced upon society by revolutionary violence - was the most viable political program. All of this he learned from his German experience and <sup>sought</sup> to apply in the United States. In his address, "The True Americanism", he said: "For me the word Americanism, true Americanism, encompasses all the noble ideas which ever swelled a human heart with noble pride".

No historian has ever questioned the fact that the German "Forty-eighter" played a decisive part in the election which made Lincoln President and in the Civil War. The Confederate cavalry officer, General Jackson, said: "Take the damned Germans out of the North and we'll soon finish the Yankees". At a time when Great Britain refused aid to the North and supported the South instead, the German-Americans succeeded in securing a multi-million dollar loan in Germany for Lincoln's Administration.

In the same year, Lincoln proclaimed the freedom of all Negroes, a great and courageous act which, to put it mildly, caused a great deal of unrest. But Europe was by no means quiet; the Poles rose up against Russia, a constitutional conflict raged in Prussia, and there was imminent danger of war between Austria, Prussia, Denmark, Russia and France.

In those days, Lincoln spoke out sharply against a hypocritical love of freedom. If freedom for all meant excluding Negroes,



foreigners and Catholics, then, Lincoln said, he would rather emigrate to a country where no such hypocrisy reigned: a country, he said, such as Russia where one could enjoy despotism in its purest form without any false mixture of hypocrisy. Even if there was no way that this sarcastic remark could be broadcast by short wave to Europe, it hit home, as Paul Valery said, on "that ridiculous cape attached to the Asiatic continent", and many in Europe knew whom the shoe fitted.

Before the uprising of 1848, a Prussian minister of state, naturally a man of standing, declared that the limited understanding of the ordinary citizen was not sufficient to enable him to apply a measure of critical appraisal to the decisions of his superiors. This delineates sharply the concept of the authoritarian mentality which the satirist Georges Grosz characterized during the so-called Weimar Republic embodied in the slogan: "Shut up and do your duty".

It was precisely in a country like Germany, which was not inclined or even able to mount a genuine revolution, that the development of social reforms became the measure and thermometer of the time. For only social equality can be a concrete expression of genuine democracy and the basis for justice and the freedom of the individual. If the world shrank from Brecht's verses:

"Now all you gentlemen who wish to lead us  
And teach us to desist from mortal sin  
Your prior obligation is to feed us:  
When we've had lunch, your preaching can begin  
All you who love your paunch and our propriety  
Take note of this one thing, for it is late:  
You may proclaim, good sirs, your fine philosophy  
But till you feed us, right and wrong can wait!"

it was only hypocrisy; because it was known from history that this was the way it was, is and would continue to be, and that St. Augustine had long since said that satisfying man's most urgent needs was the prerequisite for moral thought and action.

Didn't this also hold true in early Christian times and with the Biblical appeal to "Love thy neighbor" and not only one's "equals"? And was this not as true for Europe as it was for America. Have not all those in power, whatever their stripe, and the big entrepreneurs, repeatedly done their best to block the realization of this commandment because they feared it would entail losses for themselves?

The German Reich of 1871 was dominated by Prussia: its rule was secured by the Prussian crown, by the Prussian Minister President in his role as chancellor of the Reich, by the Prussian state legislature with its right of suffrage graduated among the three classes, by the nearly completely feudal House of Lords, and, not least of all, by the army under the direct command of the monarch. Democratic liberalism was given - as long as it behaved itself - a small protected natural preserve, while democratic socialism was strenuously opposed, or fought against.

On October 19, 1878, the German Reichstag passed the Emergency Law "against Social Democratic activities endangering the general welfare". Bismarck believed this law could succeed as an instrument in blocking a Victory of the workers' party. In the years 1878 to 1888, German courts meted out sentences against Social Democrats totalling 1,000 years in prison.

Consequently or because of this, the Social Democrats won 1 1/2 million votes in the elections of 1890 and from then on the "workers' party" was a factor to be reckoned with. During the early formative years of capitalism, whenever the working class sought to gain its slice of the pie, the entrepreneurs called for help from the state with its police and even its military. This too stimulated immigration from Germany to the United States.

In the effort to keep the working-class movement from growing, health insurance was instituted in 1883 in the German Reich, accident insurance in 1884, disability insurance in 1889, and finally in 1911 social security was embodied in national legislation. But still in 1898, 214,000 children under 14 years of age were employed in German factories, while 532,000 children were employed outside them.

In this respect, things didn't look any better in the United States. But the difference was that here, where the Bill of Rights had been proclaimed fully 16 years before the French Revolution, one could fight more openly for social progress. In this struggle, another German-American distinguished himself - Johann Peter Altgeld, the judge and governor of Illinois. He too came to America as a child with the German "Forty-eighters", and later became a staunch advocate of social reform and social equality as the foundation of democracy. Altgeld was particularly interested in judicial and prison reform, social welfare, limiting child and women labor, and the recognition of labor unions. To be sure, the capitalists ruined him through defamation, but his struggle became the legacy for a better tomorrow.

As early as 1894, in many states "Labor Day" was recognized as a legal holiday dedicated to the social progress of the working class. That did not mean the end of the struggle. For while there were hardly any antidemocratic citadels to be stormed in America as there were in Europe, the American robber barons were not one whit more disposed than their European cousins to make social concessions, unless they were put under extreme pressure. But it is not a matter of the gallons of blood that are shed or the number of barricades stormed but the changes that are effected in the future - in other words, the improvements made in the social structure of a country.

Social equality, international thinking, the freedom and equality of peoples, all of which were yesterday's socialist concepts that reeked of revolution, today have become the common property of all sensible people. But what a long way from bondage to full employment! I am inclined to think of Henry Miller's words: "Chaos is the tablet which carries the story of reality".

Germany had to lose the First World War in order to be able to undertake its first genuine attempt at democracy. Building a democracy on defeat seldom succeeds. To be the vanquished or the victor means bearing the same difficult tasks and responsibilities toward the future. In the short historical time span of 300 years all the European Great Powers performed equally badly as the role of victor passed from one to the other. The victor is easily susceptible to the danger of being unable to see farther than the crest of the particular wave carrying him at the time. The vanquished endangers his future when he tends under the burden of defeat to lose his patience, which should be his most valuable possession. This kind of loss lures the other side to take measures which worsens the position of the vanquished still more. This leads to an endless chain reaction. The duty for the one should be to look past the crest of the wave which carries him, and for the other to see beyond the trough in which he ~~th~~reatens to sink.

The interdependence between the action of the one and of the other is obvious. In an atmosphere of victor and vanquished, it is difficult to speak directly of real things. Thus one gropes for an indirect approach, the reflection in the mirror rather than reality. Many Germans have already learned the indirect or reflected-image way of expression and are beginning to understand that the inalienable rights of a people are advanced better with charm plus a sense of reality than with an uncompromising, offensive demand.

Intelligence is needed, mostly more than a nation can possess, and insight into the fact that all nations are made up of people subject to the same weakness<sup>es</sup>. If this knowledge is coupled with a sense of the demands of the day, the morrow and the day after tomorrow, then perhaps, can the great task succeed.

The following quotation from the Frankfurter Zeitung of March 10, 1919, could have been written for any era in history:

"Who is there today to tell the generals and men in power that the seemingly unshakable ground on which they stand is merely a pile of earth like any other, that beneath the surface the same explosive gases are waiting to be released which for millennia have always sought and found a balance in the changing pageant of the history of nations?"

So the great task of establishing a democratic government failed in the Weimar period. If I point out the mistakes of the victors and the fact that America has had at least 150 years more experience of democracy and law and justice, (meaning you have more tradition than we have), then it is not meant to be an excuse for the horrible period which broke out after Weimar. Germany overcompensated itself with National Socialism for the collapse of the empire which caught up in its saber-rattling megalomania the inferiority complexes of a basically unpolitical people which had never felt spiritual unity. Even Rathenau was convinced that world history would have lost its reason if Wilhelm II had marched through the Brandenburger Tor as a victor. How much more this applies to Hitler!

I want to spare myself the task of going into this gruesome era in German history, which has left us surviving Germans with an ineradicable, burning shame. There are only two thoughts I don't want to leave unmentioned. The crimes of Hitler and his henchmen elevated a few Germans to inner and outer greatness. They became heroes and even martyrs for humanity which they never would have been if they had not been challenged by the Nazi criminals. Just as here it was evil that provoked good, so is Hitler - and this is my second

thought - a reminder to all the nations of the world, including America, that wherever freedom of the individual is no longer guaranteed or ceases to exist altogether and wherever more power falls into the hands of a single person than any human being has a right to, crime takes on its first beginnings.

This brings me to the third milestone I have arbitrarily selected - 1948. This seems to me to be the actual "Year Zero". The new German currency, the D-Mark, was introduced and the German could take stock of himself and attempt a new beginning. Meanwhile, in the period since 1933, thousands upon thousands of Germans had found refuge in the United States from oppression, murder and violence. Among them were a disproportionate number of intellectuals, including 11 Nobel Prize winners. As did the "Forty-eighters" of the last century, they adapted themselves in every area in their new homeland, and from their knowledge and ability the United States profited. Unfortunately, I have no time to mention names because I could fill books with them, but in the fields of science, sociology, theology, law, medicine, the fine arts, architecture, the theater and motion picture, the achievements of German refugees represent an enormous enrichment of American life. What became America's gain remains an irreparable loss for Germany, which had 40% of all Nobel Prize winners before the war and today only 6%.

The former Secretary of Agriculture and President Henry Wallace in an essay which he wrote after the war called, "A Way to Prevent Depressions", made reference to the fact that the patents and secrets of German industry and science had contributed toward raising the economic level and general welfare of the Allies. "In numerous important instances, German scientists have made greater progress than anyone

elsewhere in the world." Wallace said, adding, "The U.S. Department of Commerce will make a thorough review of the material and will make use of it for special purposes such as the establishment of new industries, the reduction of costs in existing industries, the use of new processes, improvements in the efficiency of production and the creation of new jobs. After the First World War, Germany was able to keep all **its** production secrets. This time we will take them with us in the form of reparations which will be worth more to the American economy and labor than many millions of dollars in cash."

This sounds tougher than it actually was. Germany was hit much harder by the loss of its intellectuals who fled to America from the Nazi terror. After all, what could German industry have done with all its patents, if its reconstruction had not been made possible, as I mentioned earlier, through American aid?

There is a great deal that I cannot touch upon here. Many books could be written of the influence on America of the German schools of philosophy, especially Kant, Hegel, Leibnitz, Nietzsche and the sociologist Max Weber. Poets such as Lessing, Herder, Goethe, Schiller and Hoelderlin should also be mentioned, and it would be intriguing to see what stimuli Walt Whitman gained from German authors in writing his "Democracy in the New World". Inversely, over the past forty years American literature has exercised a marked influence on the creative style of European, and thereby German, literature.

Need I add anything about the importance of German music in the United States? From coast to coast, it holds the leading position, whether it is Bach, Mozart, Hindemith, or Meyerbeer, Wagner or Liszt. Ludwig van Beethoven has fulfilled the yearning of many generations of Americans for Romanticism,



universality, dramatic power, the fourth dimension and freedom. Did not Beethoven dedicate his "Eroica" to Napoleon Buonaparte and then tear it up when Napoleon himself placed the Emperor's crown on his own head, thus, so to speak, crowning his megalomania?

In the field of art and architecture, too, we are reminded of the Bauhaus, another example of German-American interdependence, with its teachers like Gropius, Mies van der Rohe, Kandinsky, Feininger, Klee and Schlemmer. In this field, let me just cite one case in the kaleidoscope of examples: In 1896, a highly gifted Russian turns down a professorship of jurisprudence in St. Petersburg to become a painter. He goes to Germany - to Munich and to the Bauhaus/<sup>in</sup> Dessau - and finally to Paris. Like a colossus he dominates the art of our century building a bridge from the revolutionary to the logical, from the material to the non-material and through form, line, surface and color to reach that area of abstraction which re-introduces the dionysian impulse, to effect the conquest of man and the penetration of the fourth dimension, the transcendental, or perhaps I should say, metaphysical space. The name of this colossus is Wassili Kandinsky (1866 to 1944) and the miracle he wrought occurred in three countries, although a very large part of his Oeuvre is found today in America.

Looking back over these thoughts, the question arises: What will be the enduring effects of the changes we have described? America, without seeking it, has become the power center of the Free World. In the process it has been burdened with unprecedented responsibility. It is not only a question of getting a grip on the earth but the universe as well. With the atom bomb hanging above us like a sword of Damocles, it is no

point of catharsis - an emotional experience - but rather it is a question of bringing it to critical reflection. We must once again learn the lesson of Cicero, that the rule of law is the only possible basis for a healthy modern society. The goal of the American dream has become a rule of law which will bridge national states, and the creation of an international Civitas Legum long after the Constantine dream of a Christian state, Civitas Dei, has become a dream of the past.

New York is already the seat of the United Nations - which, although the last hope of mankind, is a football and the object of contempt for many a politician and pure materialist. Dag Hammarsjöld, one of the greatest statesman of this century, set forth the problem as follows: "The dilemma of our times with its limitless possibilities for self-destruction is how to transform our world with its armaments race into a world of security founded on law". But this is exactly the problem of the United States. Bilateral agreements and treaties may still make sense now and then, but they will not serve to solve the great problems of our times, for we must have solutions which will serve to safeguard the interests of many and at times the interests of an association of states. Bilateralism avoids the light of day while multilaterism can prosper only in the sunshine."

Up to now, I have said nothing of the antithesis: communism. Although communism has not forced the Free World into perfect ~~unanimity~~ it has nonetheless pressed us into a closer union than ever before existed. Thanks to Bolshevism, we have come to know the concept of the cold war, and we have learned that it need not be the exact opposite of war, as death need not be the exact opposite of life. Each day we must risk the hazardous enterprise of exploration and negotiation in order to find a way out of stagnation and to ascertain whether

coexistence is, after all, possible. The United States is currently embarked on this political past at a time when Pope John XXIII is making a similar appeal to the conscience of the world. It is just as impossible to see the whole world living under a Pax Americana as it is under a Pax Russica.

Basically, the United States always follows its European tradition. This tradition calls for far more than a benighted insistence on old absolute ways of doing things. This tradition calls forth a constant stream of new thoughts and ideas. The prerequisites, therefore, are a wealth of ideas, integrity and intellectual superiority. Behind this drive must stand the will to change the world and not simply to interpret it. This is America's call to Europe. It must be heard if our common cultural heritage is to be saved.

Allow me to summarize:

1. German influences on American culture cannot be overlooked.
2. The fight for freedom and democracy is the focal point to which the German "Forty-eighters" of the last century contributed substantially in realizing their own ideals in the United States.
3. The imponderables are not seldom less effective than the more obvious elements.
4. Intellectually and politically, the United States today continues to follow its European tradition, constantly creating new ideas that carry the conviction to the whole free world of the validity and necessity of their thinking.

These observations are made in a time when life shifts between extreme anxiety and muffled hope. But what else can human striving be than a constant search and struggle - in America as in Europe. And since we know that time and space overflow into one another, that cosmic time is infinite and human time, finite, I should like - in order to preserve us from too much arrogance - to end with a consoling aphorism from the 19th century German poet and physicist Georg Christoph Lichtenberg:

Eternity goes on: our span of  
time puts no period on its page.

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