

America's perceptions of Europe What the book is about....

This is an unconventional book, written for the ordinary citizen, by someone who loves the United States. The desire to write this book has been with me for more than a decade, lingering in the back of my mind while life required other tasks to take precedent. After completing my doctorate, initial years of service with East Stroudsburg University, and a book on military administration with my good colleague Jeffrey Weber, I decided this project could wait no longer.

My motivation stems from two separate yet related sources. After four decades living, studying, working (in the private and public sectors, and minimum wage jobs), and traveling on both sides of the Atlantic, in poor and rich neighborhoods (including some of the most ethnically diverse areas on both continents), I never cease to be amazed at the general lack of knowledge in the US about its closest ally, and for most Americans, ancestral home. There are so many distorted, and even completely false, beliefs about Europe prevalent in the US. When I find myself discussing European society and policies with American friends, acquaintances, colleagues, or other professionals; or overhearing discussions at cafes, reading or listening to popular media sources, or teaching an international relations course, myths, misperceptions, simplifications or simply blatant inaccuracies, prove ubiquitous. The most basic of economic and social facts are either ignored or skewed, with many commentaries describing at best the Europe of the 1950s rather than 2010, and at worst an imaginary continent. Invariably, when I discuss with friends and colleagues some of the stories in the press, student comments, and responses from residents to my occasional contributions to our regional news paper, they often erupt in what can best be described as a mix of astonishment, disbelief, and, not uncommonly,

uncontrollable laughter, before questioning how so many people can be so ignorant of reality and dismissive of facts.

The second source of motivation is my love of this country, the principles on which it was founded and has thrived, and the people who carry this country forward today. The liberty, freedom, and opportunities that exist in the US are fantastic. The US is unquestionably the most successful example of how people of varied characteristics and diverse roots have coalesced around a set of enduring values; surviving challenges that would have undone most nations. I wish to contribute to strengthening our role in the world by way of clarifying how our most important partner thinks, works, and acts, and where and how we may cooperate or coordinate with, learn from, or serve as a model for, Europe.

While the subject matter discussed is serious, the style of presentation, as well as the narrative, is purposefully unusual. I take you beyond screaming headlines, pundits' misleading talking points, ideologically-founded misrepresentations and distortions of Europe presented daily as unquestionable truth to millions of Americans. Irrespective of age or background, the discussion aims to demystify and explain to you, in a straight forward and (almost) jargon-free manner the reality of contemporary Europe, and the conduct of its governments and people. In the process it will also become clear how important Europe is to the American economy and its security, far more than any other region or country. It affects your life, and that of tens of millions of other Americans, on a daily basis. I am fortunate to have the opportunities to share with you the realities of Europe, and I hope you enjoy this book.

Excerpts:

“to claim that Europe is socialist is akin to arguing that the intelligently written, very funny, but decidedly satiric, Colbert Report constitutes the only serious in-depth news reporting on American television”

“The American labor unions’ promulgate favorite mantra of being able to can compete with anyone as long as the playing field is level, only to thereafter espouse a million excuses for why other countries’ workers frequently outperform America’s, including poor countries’ dismal labor standards. Conservative pundits blame foreign governments’ currency manipulation or industrial subsidies, while proclaiming lower American taxes as the solution to all ills; this should be as convincing as Rush Limbaugh suddenly pronouncing Jimmy Carter and Jacques Chirac to have been the best American and French presidents ever. To crown the blame-game, huge swats from all ideological factions in the country whose wealth and prosperity stems from the free flow of goods, services, and ideas, happily join in a national kumbaya of self-defeating folly called protectionism”

“I feel obligated to counter distortions, misperceptions, and myths. This includes comments by ordinary citizens, whom, after one or two unexpected surprises while vacationing or studying in Europe extrapolate to all Europeans; anecdotes quickly pass for substantive knowledge. A rude waitress in Paris reflects snotty Europeans, the prevalence of windmills and recycling bins make Europeans environmental nuts, and a strike in Athens shows how Europeans just want benefits and do not want to work. I have heard these and other similar comments from relatives, students, friends, TV commentators, and on-line bloggers, but as we shall see, all these are gross misrepresentations and distortions.

