

In Search of Pro Americanism?

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The press has lately been full of stories decrying the loss of good will that the United States has suffered around the world, and bemoaning the decline in “pro Americanism” since the high point immediately after September 11, 2001. Indeed, a recent poll conducted by the University of Maryland and an outside polling firm provides evidence that public opinion around the world is starting to assume a new, 21st century configuration that reflects an increase in respect and admiration for European and Chinese influence in global affairs and, presumably, a decrease in admiration of the United States.

According to a report in the July/August issue of Foreign Policy magazine (online at www.ForeignPolicy.com), in 20 of the 23 countries that were surveyed, “a majority or a plurality welcomed Europe’s becoming more influential than the United States.” And in 16 countries, the prospect of China becoming more powerful economically was viewed as a good thing, perhaps as a counterpoint to perceived American economic bullying.

Foreign Policy argues that while there may indeed be shifts taking place in global public opinion, there is still a tremendous amount of goodwill and positive feeling about the United States out there. The authors also make the point that when you look closely at the countries with high anti-American sentiment, there are significant differences between younger and older people, and between wealthier, more educated individuals and those who are poorer and less skilled.

For example, in certain countries, many older people have had “positive experiences of American cooperation during or after the Second World War,” while in other countries, it is younger, more “aspirational” individuals who are pro-American.

Not surprisingly, a key conclusion for FP is that global attitudes *reflect American foreign policy as it is actually experienced by non-Americans*. So, for example, the World War II generation in Europe is not the only one to experience American foreign policy as a positive; in Poland, the polling data indicated that people between age 30 and 44 are very likely to support America (nearly 60% of this demographic) presumably because they have clear memories of American support for the Polish underground movement of the 1970s.

So what can American policymakers do today to encourage positive rather than negative feelings about the US outside our borders? One obvious thing that can make a huge difference over time is to **enable as many qualified foreign students as possible to study here**. Young people travel all over the world to study and while many choose to study in Australia, Canada, and Europe, there is no doubt that the US remains a top choice for most students.

When students come to the US to study, they get a chance to meet real Americans, and they come to appreciate the many wonderful aspects of “Americanism” that do not come

through our television shows, commercial culture and other questionable exports. Americans have a lot to offer the world, and now more than ever we need to remember and promote the best of our society, not the least of it. We must search within ourselves and recall why we are proud to be Americans, and we must communicate this to the world in a way that does honor to our past, our present and our future.

For example, our educational institutions are truly world class, and a degree from an American law school is prized everywhere. It is not hard to see why, when global business practices are more and more “Americanized” and the documents crafted to support even deals that don’t include any American entities call for US law to be used in case of disputes. We should not be surprised that the US legal system and an American legal education are held in such high esteem; after all, our laws have provided our society with a highly effective operating system supporting unprecedented economic, social and political development.

Each time I teach the “Introduction to the American Legal System” to foreign jurists in our LLM programs at the law school, I experience anew a profound sense of respect and gratitude for the Framers of our constitutional system. Together with my students I read the words they wrote so long ago, and we re-create the debates they engaged in as they crafted a nuanced governance system that could balance the demands of sovereign yet interdependent states and the need for a national, coordinated ‘systems manager.’

The challenges facing the world today may seem more complex than those the Framers faced, yet every era is marked by its own intransigent political and social problems. We struggle as much as the Framers did with how to envision citizenship, sovereignty, national interest and the role of the state in world affairs – but who is our Ben Franklin, Alexander Hamilton, Thomas Jefferson, James Madison, Thomas Paine and the rest?

As we search within for our renewed pro-Americanism we should recall that the Constitution and the Bill of Rights created something very new and very special: a governance regime which deliberately and effectively supported private economic initiatives, while at the same time establishing political processes that invited individuals to invest their time, energy and goodwill to create a more just society for all. It is **a constitutional structure that is not weakened by conflict** but instead is made more robust as we grapple with changes and challenges the Framers could not even have imagined.

Many foreign jurists come to our law schools to learn our secret formula for political stability, economic growth and social mobility. They want to bring the idea of a nation ruled by laws and not by men home with them, and **they are their nations’ future legislators, judges, business people and diplomats**. They dream big – as the Framers did - and we should do everything we can to increase their numbers and support their efforts, because the more successful they are in making their countries safe, stable and economically and environmentally sustainable, the safer the world will be for us.

- Lydia Lazar