



# The Atlantic Widens

Europe today is a more integrated place than at any time since the Roman Empire. Twenty-five nations are building a common economy, government, and culture, and another dozen or so are eager to join the effort. The new United States of Europe has more people, more wealth, and more trade than the United States of America.

Yet Americans have largely ignored the change in Europe. They do so at some risk, for Europe's goal is to rival and surpass America—and one of the powerful motives urging Europeans toward that goal is the disdain many of them now share for America.

by T. R. Reid

The Lardburgers were going at it again. “Ah got no gas in mah SUV,” Stacey Lardburger screamed at her husband. “And you spent all our money buyin’ ammo for your stooooo-pid rifles. So how’m ah goin’ to git to the welfare office? Will you tell me that?” Jeff Lardburger was in no mood to take that kind of grief from a mere woman, even the woman who happened to be his fourth wife. “Button it, you slut,” he roared, hurling his beer can in the general direction of Stacey’s huge head of bleached hair. “You shet that big mouth of your’n, or ah’ll sendya to Texas and puttya in the chair.” Stacey had heard warnings like that dozens of times before,

but this time she had a comeback. “You gonna be one sorry fella when ah get finished witya,” she shouted back. “Got me a lawyer now. He says next time you threaten me like ’at, we’s gonna sue your ass bigtime.”

And thus passed another interlude of domestic bliss in the typical American home depicted on “The Lardburgers,” a regular segment on the satirical British television show *Big Breakfast*. Jeff and Stacey, both so obese that they resemble the Michelin Man, are presented for the enjoyment of the British public as the kind of couple Britons like to conjure up when they think about Americans. The Lardburgers are fat, loud, and

ignorant. They argue all the time, except when they're talking about chili cheese dogs or the death penalty, the only things they both appreciate. They constantly throw beer cans, vases, and lamps at each other, knocking over piles of the tacky knickknacks that fill their mobile home. Jeff and Stacey don't have jobs, so they spend their time looking for the lawsuit that will make them rich. Their big hero, other than George W. Bush, is the woman who sued McDonald's, and won, because her coffee was too hot.

The Lardburgers, who have never known a moment of quiet, hardly make great comedy, particularly after you've caught their one-joke act a couple of times. Still, this caricature of an American couple, offered on a morning entertainment program aimed primarily at young professionals on the way to the office, does fit into a great European theatrical and literary tradition. Making fun of Americans—those crude, overweight folks in Bermuda shorts and cowboy boots who think Birmingham is in Michigan, Rome is in Georgia, and Notre Dame rhymes with “motor frame”—is one of Europe's favorite pastimes. It is a pleasure that knows no borders. The Italians make fun of American pizza. The Norwegians make fun of American sports. The English make fun of American accents. The French make fun of Americans' French. A standing joke in French TV comedies is the American couple who swagger into a restaurant, hurriedly consult their French-English dictionary, and place their order: “Doox vine blank.” When the waitress looks back with a mystified expression, the Americans panic and switch to English: “Honey, we'll have two wot wahns.” When that draws another blank look, the American says the same thing again, only louder: “Ah said, TWO WOT WAHNS!”

Determined to prove that I had the strength of character to laugh at myself, I used to go out of my way to take in this European species of comedy. As a result, I sat through a lot of dreck, such as “The Lardburgers,” or the routine of the German comedian who always portrayed the U.S.

president as a simpleton with a teddy bear in one hand and a pistol in the other. I went to a mindless student satire called *The Madness of George Dubya*, in which a bloodthirsty U.S. president leads his cabinet in a rousing musical number called “Might Makes Right.” As theater, *Madness* was basically junk, with all the subtlety of a cement truck. But it struck a chord with British audiences and sold out for weeks in the West End, London's equivalent of Broadway.

Occasionally, though, this rather masochistic habit of mine led me to some real theater—such as the hottest play on the London stage of 2003–2004, a musical titled *Jerry Springer—The Opera*. For most theatergoers, the title alone made the thing irresistible. The posters advertising this work added to the allure, promising “the classic elements of grand opera: Triumph. Tragedy. Trailer park trash.”

*Jerry Springer—The Opera* has two jokes. First, it has all the paraphernalia of grand opera—choruses, septets, lyric arias—but the singing is mainly about Jerry Springer kinds of things: violence, infidelity, weird sex. The opening chorus of the work is “My Brother's Girlfriend Used to Be My Dad.” Early in the first act, a soprano playing an American housewife named Peaches steps demurely to the front of the stage for her big aria, which begins, “The strangest thing happened last night when I went to take a leak.” The action of the “opera” is punctuated by a heroic chorus that continually bursts out in its chief refrain, “You're a loser! You're a slut!” For a while, this mockery of the operatic tradition is entertaining, but gradually the joke gets old.

The second joke in *Jerry Springer* is the same one that animates the Lardburgers and so much other European satire: a portrayal of rude, crude, boorish Americans, with all the classic stereotypes. Except for Springer himself (a native of England, as the Brits all know), every character in this “opera” is fat, stupid, prejudiced, cheating on his or her spouse, and carrying a gun. When the Springer character turns to his TV audience

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*The Eurovision Song Contest is an important source of Europe's new sense of cultural identity—and an indication that Americans don't hold a monopoly on low cultural diversion.*

on stage and asks, “What do you want to see today?” the chorus fires right back, “Lesbians fighting! Open crotch sightings!” The story of the opera, to the extent there is one, is interrupted now and then for “commercials,” and the products being touted are right out of American trash TV: plastic surgery, Viagra, and guaranteed weight-loss programs. Just to rub it in, at the end of the first act the Ku Klux Klan dances onto the stage, complete with white hoods and pointed caps, and burns a cross.

Despite my long experience watching Europeans make fun of my country, I found *Jerry Springer—The Opera* to be debilitating. “Really, we’re not like that,” I said defensively during the intermission to the kind British woman sitting next to me. She

noticed that I was disturbed and did her best to cheer me up. “Don’t worry, dahling,” she said. “We have daft chat shows over here as well. And look on the bright side: At least this play is providing employment for a lot of really fat opera singers.”

Pancontinental America-bashing is an important mindset for Americans to understand, because the sheer pleasure that Europeans take in denigrating America has become a bond unifying the continent. Widespread anti-Americanism has strengthened Europeans’ belief that an integrated European Union should stand up as a counterweight to the American brute. Until the early years of the 21st century, a majority of Europeans reacted warily to the suggestion

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that the European Union should become a “superpower.” Today, Europeans have broadly embraced the notion that their united continent should be the superpower that stands up to super-America. Surveys taken in the summer of 2003, after initiation of the intensely unpopular military action in Iraq, showed that more than 70 percent of Europeans wanted the Union to become a superpower—and that more than 70 percent expected this to happen.

To a large extent, the zeal for America-bashing stems from opposition to U.S. foreign policy—and particularly the foreign policy of George W. Bush. But the sour feeling toward America among the people of Europe goes well beyond foreign-policy issues. Across the continent today, there are all sorts of things about the United States that people can’t stand, or can’t understand, or both.

As with the rest of the world, Europe’s attitude toward the behemoth across the Atlantic is not purely negative; it’s a love-hate kind of thing. American products and American pop culture are pervasive in Europe, and immensely popular. U.S. exports—*Beverly Hills 90210*, *Dawson’s Creek*, *The West Wing*, *Sex and the City*, and, yes, *Jerry*

*Springer*—fill the airwaves, often on the prestigious public networks. (*Seinfeld* has not been as successful, apparently because the jokes don’t translate to a continental setting.) Belgium is one of the countries where U.S. global policies are most bitterly condemned by the general public, but Belgium’s homegrown version of McDonald’s, a burger-and-frites chain called Quick, uses the characters from *Friends* as its drawing card, with Phoebe serving Ross a Quickburger in the ads. On European MTV, more than half of the videos feature American bands; no translation is provided, on the theory that Generation E, the young adults of Europe, can understand the lyrics as well as an American audience. The only time MTV Europe changes this pattern is each May 9, when the network celebrates Europe Day by showing only European bands. (Actually, the producers tend to cheat by claiming Madonna as a European, on the grounds that she now lives in London with her British husband. Thus, May 9 is the day to see videos of “Papa Don’t Preach” or “Miss American Pie” on European TV sets.) All over the continent, fashionable people gather at predawn parties each April to watch the Academy Awards broadcast from Los



A view of U.S.-European relations, from the Zurich-based German paper, *Neue Zürcher Zeitung*.

Angeles. Most years, this is followed the next day with a series of angry newspaper columns complaining that, once again, the Oscar voters showed a disgraceful bias against all European movies. The one time when the voters proved they were not biased—that was 1999, when Roberto Benigni won the Best Actor award for his performance in *La Vita è Bella* (*Life Is Beautiful*)—all of Italy celebrated for a week.

To the consternation of the great continental fashion houses, American labels—Levi's, Gap, Tommy Hilfiger, Abercrombie & Fitch—are de rigueur for Generation E. For Europe's youth movement, any article of clothing genuinely "from the States" has innate value. Walking past a trendy boot store in London's Camden Town neighborhood one day, I was offered £200 on the spot for the cowboy boots I was wearing. That was \$370, more than twice what I had paid for the boots, new, back home in Colorado. When I hesitated, the shopkeeper threw in a cheap pair of trainers (that's British for "gym shoes") to get me home. I laughed all the way to the bank to cash my check.

American fast food is ubiquitous on the continent; that explains why the standard for price transparency is the "Big Mac Index." The sheep farmer Jose Bove became a national hero, of sorts, in France by wrecking a McDonald's outlet and defending himself on the grounds that "it's American, from the country that promotes globalization and industrial food production and unfairly penalizes the small French farmer." (Bove was sentenced to 20 days in jail for vandalism, which only increased the size of his following.) Still, France has more than 1,000 McDonald's outlets that do quite nicely, thank you, even when situated right next to a traditional *boulangerie*. No matter what the Bove-istes might say, it is hard to call this an American "invasion," since every one of the French outlets belongs to a French franchisee. Nobody is forcing the Belgians, the Spaniards, or the Danes to drink Coca-Cola or wear Nikes; the fact is, Europeans like American stuff. The novelist Arthur Koestler, a prominent America-basher in his day, had the intellectual honesty to admit

this point in a 1951 essay: "Who coerced us into buying all this? The United States do not rule Europe as the British rule India; they waged no Opium War to force the revolting 'Coke' down our throats. Europe bought the whole package because Europe wanted it."

Almost despite themselves, Europeans visiting "the States" often find themselves charmed by American ways. Even a lefty columnist such as John Sutherland, of London's *Guardian* newspaper, was so taken by the small graces of life in the United States that he made a list of "52 things they do better in America." Among the items that caught his eye—none of them common in Europe—were:

1. Free refills of coffee (without asking)
2. Newspaper vedomats on street corners
3. "Paper or plastic?" (what the bagger says in your friendly 24-hour supermarket)
4. Drive-through banking
5. High school graduation ceremonies, and regular class reunions
6. Free or cut-price parking at cinemas and restaurants
7. Ubiquitous 24-hour convenience stores
8. Fridges big enough for a 30-pound turkey

There is a whole genre of contemporary European literature involving people who have moved to, or spent some time in, the United States and are surprised to find themselves adopting American habits. The English novelist Zoe Heller, in an essay titled "Help! I'm Turning into an American Parent," described how she was at first appalled at the way American parents constantly praise their children: "To an English sensibility, these anthologies of praise seem mawkish. Unseemly. Deleterious to an appropriate sense of modesty." But gradually, Heller wrote, she began to see her own daughter responding positively to the endless encouragement she got at preschool in Santa Monica. "One of the things most admired about Americans is their can-do spirit, their optimism and self-belief and so on," Heller concluded. "It occurs to me that their child-rearing techniques might have something to do with that sunny outlook. . . . What, indeed, if the Americans' cossetting methods are the real reason they are a superpower?"

Europeans also appreciate some of the larger virtues of American life: the nation's youthful vigor, its open-armed acceptance of new ideas, its great universities, and the classlessness that means the American dream really works. Even the staunchest European leftists admire America's willingness to take in refugees by the millions, accept them as American, and then hold a fancy ceremony, with a judge or a senator presiding, to make their citizenship official. (In Europe, becoming a new citizen generally involves nothing more than a bureaucrat stamping a form in a cluttered office, and payment of the required fee.) Almost every European—particularly east of the former Iron Curtain—has a neighbor or cousin or grandchild who has emigrated to Milwaukee or Portland or Tallahassee. These relatives recognize the symbolic power of the Statue of Liberty and the generosity of a rich, powerful nation that embraces poor, powerless newcomers from anywhere on earth. In the beautiful old city of Riga, Latvia, I got to talking with Marie Rabinovich, whose daughter had emigrated to Denver a decade earlier. Marie told me proudly that her daughter had become an American citizen and was about to cast her first vote in the 2000 election between George W. Bush and Al Gore. "It is amazing thing," Marie told me, in decent English, "that my daughter, a peasant, is allowed to choosing the most powerful man in the world." No matter how fashionable America-bashing has become, people all over the continent still get letters every month from their cousins in Chicago urging them to emigrate to the U.S.A.

But the Europeans also know what they don't like about the United States. These views tend to be set forth in a series of best-selling books, one after another, with such titles as *Dangéreuse Amérique* or *The Eagle's Shadow* or *Pourquoi le monde déteste-t-il l'Amérique?* The depiction of the United States in these popular volumes has been summarized neatly by the American scholar Tony Judt: "The U.S. is a selfish, individualistic society devoted to commerce, profit, and the despoliation of the planet. It is uncaring of the poor and sick and it is indifferent to the rest of humankind. The U.S. rides roughshod over international laws and treaties and threatens the

moral, environmental, and physical future of humanity. It is inconsistent and hypocritical in its foreign dealings, and it wields unparalleled military clout. It is, in short, a bull in the global china shop."

Most Europeans are appalled by the death penalty. And because each American execution tends to get big play in the French, German, Spanish, and British media, Europeans think American electric chairs are used much more frequently than is actually the case. The constitutional "right to keep and bear arms," and the gun lobby that defends it, also tend to mystify the people of Europe, even those who are strongly pro-American on most issues. Once, in September 1999, when I was watching the TV news in Norway, there was a report on Hurricane Floyd, which had swept up the east coast of the United States and wreaked considerable destruction. The Norwegian correspondent on the scene was deeply impressed by the fact that some 2.6 million people—equivalent to half the population of Norway!—had been successfully evacuated from coastal areas to escape danger. On the same day, though, one of those tragic gun massacres had left seven Americans dead and a dozen badly wounded in a church (!) in Texas. "What kind of society is it," the reporter asked plaintively, "that can move millions of people overnight in the name of safety, but then expose them to crazy men wielding guns on every street?"

I was surprised to find that the open display of patriotism—something I had taken to be a universal human impulse—is widely sneered at in Europe. After all, it was a European who turned that impulse into deathless verse:

Breathes there the man with soul so dead  
Who never to himself hath said,  
"This is my own, my native land!"

But when the great Scot Sir Walter Scott wrote that in 1805, it was still an acceptable, even admirable, point of view for Europeans. Today, the way of thinking that says, "This is my native land, and I love it," is considered an American peculiarity. The Europeans, of course, are working hard to move away from their nationalistic tendencies

and toward a supranational union that eviscerates borders and traditional national rivalries, and this perhaps explains the exasperation with old-style love of country in the United States. Ian Buruma, a Dutchman living in Britain, caught this mood perfectly after seeing the American flag everywhere during a visit to New York:

To most Europeans born after the Second World War, it is a somewhat bewildering sight, this massive outpouring of patriotism. . . . Those of us who pride ourselves on a certain degree of sophistication view flag-waving with lofty disdain. It is embarrassing, mawkish, potentially bellicose. I must confess that I find the sight of grown men touching their hearts at the sound of the national anthem a little ridiculous, too. And the ubiquitous incantations of “God Bless America” seem absurdly over the top. Mawkishness and a beady eye on commercial opportunity go together in the land of the free in a way that can be quite disconcerting.

**T**he place where American patriotism seems to annoy Europeans the most is at international sporting events. Chants of “U S A! U S A!” and “We’re number one!” may seem normal fan behavior to Americans, but they drive Europe crazy. When Russian competitors lost gold medals because of disputed calls by referees in hockey, figure skating, and Nordic skiing in the 2002 Winter Olympics, President Vladimir Putin condemned the International Olympic Committee for “biased decisions and pro-American judgments at the Winter Games.” Most Americans put this down to sour grapes; almost all Europeans, however, agreed with Putin that the noisy home fans in Salt Lake City—where 93 percent of all tickets were sold to Americans—had put impossible pressure on the officials. “What the Russians are upset about,” wrote Simon Barnes, the sports columnist for *The Times* of London, when the Salt Lake games ended, “is the transformation of the

Olympic Games into yet another American Festival of Victory. The world has been treated to 17 days of whooping crowds and American athletes hysterical with their adrenalin-stoned patriotism. I’ve had many wonderful times in the States and have many good American friends. But whooping, en masse, up-yours patriotism is not endearing. . . . And so the world watched the Winter Games . . . hoping that the American in the race would fall over.”

I don’t think Barnes is overstating the case here. The Europeans really do want to see American competitors fall over and lose—and thus give the “whooping patriots” in the American cheering section their due comeuppance. Even the ever-so-proper world of golf erupts in rage again and again at the conduct of U.S. players and fans. There was the infamous (in Europe, at least) “Battle of Brookline” during the 1999 Ryder Cup, the biennial competition in which a team of European professional golfers takes on an American all-star team. With the match all even on the last hole in Brookline, Massachusetts, an American sank a long birdie putt that put the U.S. team ahead by one stroke. The fans erupted—“U S A! U S A!”—and swarmed onto the green in glee to applaud their heroes. The problem was, the match wasn’t over. A European player still had a putt to make that could have tied the score; after all the hoopla, and the crowd’s footprints covering the green, he missed. “Evidently, they care more about an American victory than they do about sportsmanship,” declared an angry European player, José Maria Olazabal of Spain. A year later, when the Solheim Cup competition—the female version of the Ryder Cup—was played in Scotland, the American team caused a pan-European furor. The Swedish star Annika Sorenstam sunk a long chip shot from off the green that seemed to sew up a European victory. But then the American captain, Pat Bradley, approached the referee and said Sorenstam’s great birdie should be disallowed, because the Swede had shot out of turn. It was a technicality—indeed, a tiny technicality—but the judges decided, once the issue had been raised, that they had to enforce the rule. In a scene played over and

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over on European TV news, Sorenstam broke into tears and denounced American competitiveness. “I was shocked that they took my shot away,” she said. “The entire European team is disgusted with America. We all ask ourselves, ‘Is this how badly they need to win?’”

**A**nother common grievance among Europeans is the sense—it is, indeed, conventional wisdom almost everywhere—that Americans are insular people, ignorant of and indifferent to the rest of the planet. This has been a standard European complaint for more than a century. In her 1852 best-seller *Domestic Manners of the Americans*, the British traveler Frances Trollope—aunt of the great Victorian novelist—established the theme with her conclusion about the American worldview: “If the citizens of the United States were indeed the devoted patriots they call themselves, they would surely not thus encrust themselves in the hard, dry, stubborn persuasion that they are the first and best of the human race, that nothing is to be learnt, but what they are able to teach, and that nothing is worth having, which they do not possess.” In the contemporary version of this stereotype, the paradigmatic American is that tourist on the French comedy shows who walks into a Paris café and orders “two wot wahns.” Brian Reade, a columnist for the London tabloid *The Mirror*, summarizes this widespread European belief:

They are wonderfully courteous to strangers, yet indiscriminately shoot kids in schools. They believe they are masters of the world, yet know nothing about what goes on outside their shores. Yanks . . . the people whose IQ is smaller than their waist size. People who believe the world stretches from California to Boston and everything outside is the bit they have to bomb to keep the price of oil down. When I first visited America in 1976, teenagers asked if we had cars, and, if so, how we could drive them on our cobbled streets. Two months ago, a man from Chicago asked me how often we vote for a new Queen. Only one in five Americans holds a pass-

port and the only foreign stories that make their news are floods, famine, and wars, because it makes them feel good to be an American. Feeling good to be American is what they live for. It’s why they call their baseball league the World Series, why they can’t take our football because they didn’t invent it.

As I often argued in Europe, the charge that Americans are insular is absurdly off base. No country on earth has a broader distribution of races, creeds, and nationalities than the United States, and each of the ethnic groups in America maintains a close interest in developments back in the old country. One day on the BBC’s excellent *Dateline* program, Gavin Esler, the presenter—that’s the British word for “anchorman”—was haranguing me about Americans’ ignorance of the outside world, and their inability to master foreign languages. “You know, the way Americans speak French is just to say the word in English, only louder,” he said, laughing. I know Gavin loves a good debate, so I took him on. I said that the citizenry of the United States is the world’s largest repository of language skills. “We have a couple of million Polish speakers,” I said. “We have more Estonian speakers than there are in Tallinn. We have 100,000 people in America who read a Cambodian newspaper every week. I’ll bet there aren’t 100 people in all of Britain who can read Cambodian.” Esler was undeterred by this line of argument. He responded, in essence, that America shouldn’t get credit for its formidable body of Cambodian linguistic talent because we imported it rather than teach the language in our schools.

**W**hat really annoys the Europeans is that this nation perceived to be ignorant of the rest of the world has the wealth and power to dominate much of it. The French parliamentarian Noël Mamère racked up strong sales with a book, *No Thanks, Uncle Sam*, arguing that “it is appropriate to be downright anti-American” because of this combination of strength and stupidity. “Omnipotence and ignorance,” he wrote, “is a questionable cocktail. It would be great if they saw what they looked like from over here. But they are



not interested. They think they are the best in the world, that they are way ahead of everyone, and everyone needs to learn from them.”

This mix of experiences, attitudes, and urban myths, some dating back many decades, meant that ordinary Europeans’ view of the United States was fairly critical even before the earthshaking developments at the start of the 21st century. The French polling firm Groupe CSA regularly surveys opinion across France about contemporary issues, and periodically takes a poll titled “L’image des États-Unis.” Almost every French citizen feels knowledgeable enough to answer the questions—only a tiny minority say they aren’t familiar with the details of American life—and the results are generally unflattering. The image of the United States tends to vary slightly in these polls depending on recent events—predictably, esteem for America dropped during and after the Iraq invasion of 2003—but the general pattern is fairly constant over the years. A survey taken in the fall of 2000 gives a baseline reading on French attitudes toward life in the United States. Asked the question, “As far as you’re concerned, what kind of country is the United States?” the French public gave the following answers:

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| 1. A nation of violence                  | 50% |
| 2. A nation that uses the death penalty  | 48% |
| 3. A nation of great social inequality   | 45% |
| 4. A nation of innovation                | 37% |
| 5. A racist nation                       | 33% |
| 6. A nation where anything goes          | 27% |
| 7. A nation where anyone can get rich    | 24% |
| 8. A nation that welcomes immigrants     | 15% |
| 9. A society where religion is pervasive | 15% |
| —No opinion about America—               | 3%  |

Given those broad impressions, it’s not surprising that only 12 percent of French people surveyed said they felt “admiration” for the United States. Another 14 percent reported a generally “positive” view. In contrast to the 26 percent who held a favorable view of America, 12 percent said the United States made them worried, and 34 percent of those polled said their view of the United States was “critical.”

Other European populations were perhaps not so critical as the French, but the general pattern across the continent in 2000 would have been roughly similar to what that Groupe CSA survey found. And then came the Bush presidency, the horrific events of 9/11, and Iraq. As George W. Bush geared up for his reelection campaign at home, the gap in understanding, respect, and friendship was arguably wider than it had ever been before.



*Protesters gathered outside NATO headquarters in Brussels in June 2001 await the arrival of President George W. Bush, whom they seek to instruct in civilized (i.e., European) behavior.*

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At first, September 11, 2001, seemed to shrink the Atlantic. Just hours after the buildings were hit in New York and Washington, British prime minister Tony Blair assured Americans that Europe “stands shoulder to shoulder with you.” In a unanimous vote on September 12, the North Atlantic Treaty Organization invoked—for the first time in its 50-year history—Article 5 of its founding treaty, the clause that says an attack on one member is considered an attack on all NATO nations. Even that venerable organ of Euro-left anti-Americanism, France’s *Le Monde*, declared “Nous sommes tous Américains”—“We are all Americans.” On September 13, Queen Elizabeth II broke all precedent by ordering the Royal Marine Band to play “The Star-Spangled Banner” during the changing of the guard at Buckingham Palace. A survey two weeks after the attack by the Swiss polling company Isubpublic found that the peace-minded Europeans were ready to go to war against the perpetrators of the attack, or their host nation. Asked if their own countries should support a U.S. military assault, 80 percent of Danish respondents backed the idea, as did 79 percent of respondents in Britain, 73 percent in France, 58 percent in Spain and Norway, and about 53 percent in Germany. The only European nation that resisted the idea of fighting alongside the Americans was Greece, where only 29 percent supported military action.

To be an American in Europe in those troubled, frightening days after 9/11 was to be surrounded by support, sympathy, and unsolicited words of encouragement. When people realized an American was present—usually from hearing an American accent—they would go out of their way to express consolation and friendship. On a nondescript traffic island near Grosvenor Square in London, somebody tied an American flag around an old oak tree early on September 12. Over the next few days, a mountain grew beside the tree—a mountain of flowers, flags, cards, candles, tear-stained notes, pictures, paintings, and a New York Yankees cap. This was the British people’s spontaneous tribute to the Americans who were murdered on 9/11. There were no instructions about this, no coordination. These were simply ordinary people who felt a need to

send America a message—people such as Rob Anderson of London, who left a big spray of roses with a handwritten card: “Dear America, You supported us in two world wars. We stand with you now.” Similar floral mountains went up outside the U.S. embassies in Moscow, Copenhagen, Lisbon, and Madrid. London’s largest cathedral, St. Paul’s, invited every Yank in town to a memorial service on September 14. The local paper in Ipswich devoted its entire front page on September 12 to a banner headline: “God Bless America.” Across the continent, there was an overwhelming sense that the whole of the West was under attack. We were all Americans now. We were all in this thing together.

This initial rush of good feeling was accompanied by action. The first arrests of conspirators charged with planning the 9/11 attacks were made in Germany. European intelligence agencies basically opened their files on suspected Muslim militants to investigators from the CIA and the FBI. When the United States went to war in Afghanistan a month after the attacks, European public opinion strongly supported the move; more important, nearly every NATO member sent troops, weapons, and money to help topple the Taliban. The vaunted “Atlantic Alliance” was working together more closely than at any time since the depths of the Cold War.

But over the next three years, that moment of transatlantic togetherness in the fall of 2001 came to look like a blip, a momentary aberration caused more by the sudden shock of those burning buildings than by common bonds of interest and policy. Within a year of 9/11, European government ministers, columnists, and academics were once again depicting the United States as a selfish, gun-happy “hyperpower” that had shifted into “unilateralist overdrive,” to borrow a term from Chris Patten, the European Union’s commissioner for external affairs, a man who was supposed to be diplomatic about such things. “The whole concept of the ‘West’ feels out of date now,” said Dominique Moisi, of the Institut Français des Relations Internationales in Paris, about 18 months after the attacks. “September 11 brought us together, but only temporarily. We have to realize that major differences exist across the Atlantic, and will not go away. Europe and the U.S. will have to live with

them.” The transatlantic chill stemmed in part from one man: President George W. Bush has been highly unpopular among the people of Europe. “Almost everyone on the European side agrees that the relationship is far worse since George W. Bush was elected,” Moisi said. The war in Iraq, opposed by large popular majorities in every EU country—even nations such as Britain, Spain, and Poland, which the United States counted as allies in the war—exacerbated the split. Spain’s José María Aznar, who supported Bush in Iraq, paid a high price for his pro-war stance. In the spring of 2004, in the wake of a terrorist bombing, the voters of Spain dumped Aznar’s Popular Party and handed the government in Madrid to the strongly antiwar Socialists.

**T**he process of “continental drift” driving the United States and Europe apart was also propelled by venerable European complaints about America, feelings dating back at least to Mrs. Trollope. The Bush administration strengthened all the old prejudices, and tended to confirm the old stereotypes. The new president, a pro-death-penalty oil man swaggering into the White House despite winning half a million fewer votes than his opponent, was “a walking gift to every European anti-American caricaturist.” It was repeatedly reported in the European press that America’s new leader had never been to Europe. This claim was false—Bush had made half a dozen trips across the Atlantic before he entered the White House—but it neatly fit the common perception of an American president who didn’t know the first thing about Europe. Bush fueled this European view with some unfortunate policy blunders after taking office. For example, he personally phoned European prime ministers to urge them to admit Turkey to the European Union. This lobbying mission was doomed to fail, and it did. Worse than that, the president angered the leaders on the receiving end of his calls. “How could the White House possibly think that they could play a role in determining who joins the EU?” Chris Patten later commented.

Opinion polls demonstrate how far the image of the United States has fallen since that brief moment of post-9/11 togetherness. A U.S. State Department poll in 1998 found that 78

percent of Germans had a favorable view of the United States. In 2002, a survey by the Pew Research Center in Washington, D.C., found that 61 percent of Germans were so inclined. Two years later, in the wake of the war in Iraq, only 38 percent of Germans had a positive feeling toward the United States, the nation that had been Germany’s strongest ally, and military defender, for 59 years. In France, positive feelings toward America fell from 62 percent in 1999 to 37 percent in the spring of 2004. “If anything, fear and loathing of the United States has increased,” wrote the Pew Center’s pollster, Andrew Kohut, a few months after the fall of Baghdad. “Even in the United Kingdom, the United States’ most trusted European ally, 55 percent see the U.S. as a threat to global peace. And in four EU countries—Greece, Spain, Finland, and Sweden—the United States is viewed as the greatest threat to world peace, more menacing than Iran or North Korea.”

**I**n a geopolitical application of Newton’s third law, the actions tending to divide the old Atlantic Alliance have sparked an equal and opposite reaction in Europe: Divisions with America have prompted the Europeans to draw closer together, to look even harder for unity among themselves. The growing sense that the United States is no longer the continent’s protector but rather a potential threat—or even, perhaps, the “greatest threat”—has strengthened the movement toward “ever closer union” among the members of the European Union. Since the Europeans can no longer trust or align themselves with the world’s only superpower, they have no choice but to build a superpower of their own. That, at least, is the reasoning of many EU leaders, including the most recent president of the European Commission, Romano Prodi. “There is a rhythm of global dominance,” Prodi observed a couple of years after 9/11. “No country remains the first player forever. Maybe this American hour will not last. And who will be the next leading player? Maybe next will be China. But more probably, before China, it will be the united Europe. Europe’s time is almost here. In fact, there are many areas of world affairs where the objective conclusion would have to be that Europe is already the superpower, and the United States must follow our lead.” □