

What Europeans can learn from Americans



THERE'S NO OTHER country in the world that stirs up as much emotion as the United States of America. It's a place that we Europeans love to hate, or hate to love, as the case might be. The most ardent critics of the US are often those who have never visited the "New World."

I belong to the category of Europeans who love America, faults and all. I completed my bachelors degree at Furman University in Greenville, South Carolina. It was a memorable four years, which had a great impact on my life. Paradoxically, it made me more aware about what it is to be European.

I came to the States with a typically arrogant European attitude. "Those Americans, they must just be a bunch of Big Mac-eating, Coca-Cola-drinking, TV-watching, uncivilised, fat slob," I thought. Oh, how wrong I was. As a matter of fact, I think we Europeans have a lot to learn from Americans.

Don't judge a country by its leader.

Europeans find it hard to admit that the US is the oldest democracy in the world. When our monarchs were busy shooting down the ideas of Montesquieu and John Locke, the Americans were already applying them. Not perfectly, but applying them nonetheless.

We owe a lot to the US. The Americans came to the rescue during two world wars. Their Marshall aid and support for European integration brought the old continent back on its feet.

Today the US is the undisputed superpower of the world. A superpower is rarely loved, no matter what it does.

The US is about more than popular culture and Hollywood. It hosts some of the world's best universities and takes home a great majority of all Nobel prizes.

So, what then can we learn from Americans? At least three things come to mind.

The first is attitude. The Americans have a no-nonsense can-do mentality about everything. They are true go-get-

ters. There is no challenge that is too big for an entrepreneurial American.

Sometimes this over-confident approach may seem arrogant, but most of the time it's true self-belief. Nothing stands in the way of "life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness."

This attitude also means that there's little fear of failure. An American businessman is not a true entrepreneur if he has not gone bankrupt at least twice.

Second, Americans are probably the most creative people in the world. It is the "land of opportunity." If you see a crazy sport or an absurd invention, you can bet that it's American. Not only that, it's usually profitable.

Who seriously get kicks out of monster trucks or professional wrestling? In

which other country could a former Austrian body-builder and action movie-star become governor of the biggest state?

Third, the US knows what service is all about.

Things simply work in the US. Just compare the qual-

ity of service that you get in a diner in San Francisco to what you get in a café in Paris – especially if you don't speak French.

From renting a car to staying in a hotel, shopping and dining out, the service is simply impeccable in the US. And if it doesn't work, you can always sue them. American lawyers might rob you, but at least they do it with a smile....

There's more to America than meets the eye. Every US state is different: New Yorkers and Texans don't even speak the same language. The former is more liberal than most European states. And the latter competes in conservatism with the Vatican.

Whatever you think about the US, two things are for sure: it ain't boring and it has world-wide influence. That's why everyone is following the US presidential elections so closely: regardless of who is elected, the US is about much more than merely its leader. ■■

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