AWKWARD DOMINION
American Political, Economic, and Cultural Relations with Europe, 1919–1933

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Dawes Plan and Locarno. Americans built a structure of prosperity, hoping it could accommodate further peaceful change. This interdependence of politics and business continued in the 1930s when the economic crash brought down the policy of peaceful Versailles revision. American cultural influence in Europe also flowed and ebbed with the economic tide. Unlike the political policy of peaceful change, however, the cultural impact of American technology persisted, in transmuted form, into the future.

**The Americanization of Europe in the 1920s**

In the 1920s, American economic, political, and cultural influence washed over Europe. The first cultural wave came in 1917–19 with the two-million-man American Expeditionary Force, which brought Europeans face to face with the United States' power and creativity, the development of which they had watched for over two centuries. A second swell of cultural influence followed the Dawes Plan, Locarno, and the financial stabilizations. These achievements, the fruit of the peaceful change and economic reconstruction policy, opened Europe to American business and cultural penetration. Tourists, expatriates, and Hollywood films flooded Europe, serving as missionaries for American life-styles and products. The United States' rank as the world's most powerful nation induced Europeans to pay attention to American culture. That culture's vitality, and its appropriateness to the machine age, made it all the more attractive to Europeans struggling with modernization. American models influenced Europe's popular entertainment, its artistic development, and its thoughts about the future. In cultural matters as well as in economic and political ones, the United States was the engine, the leading nation whose independent and pioneering course Europe was compelled to follow.

Perhaps because Europeans were so fascinated by the United States' economic power, they interpreted aspects of American culture, whether literature or life-style, as the products of a machine-dominated society. Increased mechanization, they believed, was the central element of Americanization. For many Europeans, American culture was above all technological. *Americanism* suggested materialism, efficiency, largeness, mechanization, standardization, automation, mass production, mass consumption, mass democracy, technocracy, uniformity, pragmatism, reformism, optimism, spontaneity, generosity, and openness.
made pilgrimages to Europe, looking for freedom and esthetic inspiration. There they found many artists fascinated with the technology-dominated culture they had scorned. Moreover, significant numbers of expatriate artists ended up financing their adventures by working for compatriot businessmen and tourists. In the Old World, then, many Yankee artists found both esthetic validation and financial support for developing an indigenous American art.

Just as America's power led Europeans to heed American culture, so too did such prestige or moral power enhance the effectiveness of the United States' unofficial economic diplomacy. Washington officials realized that America's reputation for success and efficiency, coupled with its lack of interest in most European political rivalries, gave the nation a subtle but important moral authority in the Old World.

The State Department valued this asset because it yielded influence abroad with minimal cost or responsibility. Department officials tried to maximize America's moral power by making sure their foreign policy initiatives would succeed. In 1927, the department countered European resentment of U.S. power by using Charles Lindbergh as a goodwill ambassador. Like the AEF a decade earlier, Lindbergh riveted Europeans' attention on Yankee boldness and technology, and thus quickened the pace of Americanization.

The American Expeditionary Force

AEF soldiers did more than fight. They impressed allies and enemies with American motor vehicles and American know-how. In Germany the doughboys helped suppress bolshevism; in Poland they fought typhus. As good Progressives they believed that with enough “soap, clean towels, and above all clean underwear, we can wash Poland.”

The first American troops paraded through Paris on July 4, 1917, a time when the French army faced mutiny and exhaustion. Prefects throughout France reported that arrival of these American “saviors” raised civilian morale. George Creel, director of the Committee on Public Information, tried to undermine German morale by dropping behind enemy lines pamphlets that promised American-sized rations for prisoners-of-war and pictured the huge AEF buildup in France.

The buildup made good propaganda, but it snarled traffic in the French ports allotted to American traffic. St. Nazaire and Nantes. AEF engineers tackled the difficulty by building new port facilities, stringing telephone lines, and constructing a reservoir. French newspapers admired the Americans' superior “boldness” and “initiative,” and found French accom-
plishments wanting by comparison. Struggling to comprehend the invasion, journalists defined "Americanism" as a "method of procedure ... more concerned to do things well and quickly than to follow old-fashioned regulations." Many argued that adoption of this attitude "will do us good." The AEF introduced the French to jazz as well as American methods, whetting appetites for the jazz bands that flocked to Paris in the twenties. Although not all Frenchmen and women liked jazz, most appreciated the doughboys' sense of humor, kindness to children, and generosity. Marriage statistics perhaps best convey the closeness of the personal ties between many Yankees and the French. In St. Nazaire, Franco-American nuptials in 1919 reached 21.7 percent of the total, climbing to 37 percent in June. Although most soldiers brought their wives back to America, some fifteen hundred remained with their spouses in France, forming a link between the two societies and a vanguard for the 1920s expatriates.

Less happy relations also foreshadowed the 1920s. Although trigger-happy soldiers and hostile French peasants caused incidents throughout the AEF's two-and-a-half-year stay trouble worsened after the Armistice. Americans awaiting transport home were bored, and irked by gouging merchants; many French chafed at the foreigners' continued occupation. Local newspapers condemned Woodrow Wilson's stance at Versailles.

On the second anniversary of Congress's declaration of war on Germany, street fighting broke out between AEF soldiers and natives of St. Nazaire. Anti-American demonstrations followed in other cities. In Nice a gang ambushed and killed American military police. Such hostility exposed the reverse side of French admiration for America and foreshadowed the difficulties between the two nations from 1919 to 1933. In 1919 as in later years, the United States' riches and efficiency excited envy and fear as well as adulation.

Specific complaints against the AEF paralleled later ones against American businessmen and tourists. Although Americans tried to improve transportation facilities, the heavy AEF vehicles angered natives by clogging traffic and damaging highways. Many French people later condemned the mass production methods, imported from America, that forced changes in their lives. The French complained of AEF requisitions and later war debt demands, even though the United States tardily paid for the requisitions and reduced the burden of the war debt. Proper Frenchmen and women deplored the doughboys' sometimes crude and violent behavior. Working-class Frenchmen charged that the free-spending Americans bid up the cost of living and corrupted the local women. In the 1920s, tourists and expatriates drew the same charges. Thus, the AEF's impact in the postwar era increased both cultural exchange and the tensions between Americans and French.

The American army's experience in occupied Germany was a happier one, and it too foreshadowed the 1920s. After initial hostility, soldiers of the American Forces in Germany (AFG) and civilians of the Rhinelant soon developed cordial relations. In mid-1919, the New York Times repeatedly criticized American soldiers who loudly compared German hospitality with French hostility. Doughboys found Fräulein even more attractive than Mademoiselle. Commanding General Henry Allen stated that one-third of his men had married German girls. The venereal disease rate hit 423 per 1000. Germans both welcomed and resented the free-spending Americans. In marks, an AFG private's pay exceeded that of some German bank president. Despite the Reich's technological achievements, AFG personnel demonstrated to the Germans superior methods for drilling wells, maintaining sanitation, building bridges, and repairing roads. American forces also maintained order, suppressing a strike and Communist agitation.

The Rhinelant occupation from 1919 to 1923 underscored America's decisive role in the war and doubtless heightened Germany's receptivity to U.S. methods, ideas, and products. In 1931, a German observed: "Victors in war always become the unconscious ideal and model of the conquered: America, which has conquered the whole world, has stamped its childish version of mechanistic style on our era." Although Germans and other Europeans found it easy to criticize American culture, it was harder to deny that culture's pervasive influence in the Old World.

In 1917-19 other Americans influenced Europe. Convinced that "American theories" were essential to European reconstruction, American women formed the Committee for Devastated France, which undertook social work and reconstruction in the Aisne, one of the worst battlefield areas. André Tardieu (later prime minister) recalled that the committee molded much of the social reorganization of Aisne; it introduced community "public spirit." With the committee's guidance the French organized agricultural cooperatives, public libraries, Boy Scout troops, and nursing schools. These institutions offered services and, the Americans calculated, opened new career opportunities for French women. Local peasants and townspeople came to appreciate the new institutions, and maintained them after the Americans left in 1923. Although the French had at first resisted American social service techniques, the committee concluded, they had "bent to the contact of our methods." With similar Progressive idealism, the Young Women's Christian Association (YWCA) trained women of Czechoslovakia and Poland in recreation and social service work.

Other Americans set up schools and hospitals. Probably the most influential was the American Red Cross Albanian Vocational School (AVS) in Tirana, established upon completion of wartime medical relief. Under
American direction, the AVS operated in English, which Albania had adopted as its second tongue. The school provided Tirana with electricity, operated a printing press for the government, improved agriculture, installed the nation's first indoor water tap, and trained hundreds of young Albanians. Oriented toward American ideas, methods, and products, AVS graduates challenged Italian domination of Albania. Despite the Americans' sincere protests about the "disinterested character" of their involvement in the school, such cultural influence had unavoidable political implications, which did not escape the Italians. In 1933 they insisted that the Americans leave.21

As the AVS demonstrated, there was direct linkage between America's participation in the Great War and the subsequent economic and cultural penetration of Europe. The soldiers and social workers awakened Europeans to the advantages of American products. Observing the AEF's mobile antityphus campaign in Poland, the minister of health remarked, "One Doctor plus one Ford makes six Doctors."22 Some 10,000 AEF and AFG soldiers plus ARA veterans remained in Europe, and others returned in the 1920s as tourists and representatives of U.S. firms. The AFG newspaper called the troops "but a vanguard of millions of Americans who will ... invade the several states of Europe. We are paving the way for the men who will enter the European markets of the future."23

That invasion accelerated after the Dawes Plan and Locarno stabilized Europe. American tourists, expatriates, and movies broadened Europe's exposure to Yankee products, life-styles, and ideas. Along with the loans that flooded Europe after 1924–25, tourists provided Europeans with the dollars they needed to pay their debts and buy American exports. The annual pilgrimage of as many as a quarter of a million tourists, plus the presence of eighty thousand U.S. expatriates, stimulated consumption in Europe of American products. Tourists and expatriates demanded the same goods—cokes and chewing gum, typewriters and Ford—that they knew at home. Their example, highlighted by the consumption patterns portrayed in Hollywood films, aroused European desires for the same amenities. Tourists and expatriates who fled Main Street found much of the Old World entranced with Wall Street and Hollywood. The economic and cultural exchange was a dynamic process. As Europe became more Americanized, more tourists felt comfortable vacationing there. Similarly, Europe's Americanization stimulated demand for U.S. exports, which in turn enhanced the prosperity that financed tourists' trips to Europe.

Tourists and Expatriates

Tourists constituted the largest and economically most important American group in Europe. The number of United States visitors jumped from roughly 15,000 in 1912 to 251,000 in 1929. In the latter year, American citizens in Europe spent close to $323 million and immigrants visiting home expended an additional $87 million. By the end of the 1920s, foreign travel became possible for middle-class Americans.24

Visits to Paris nightclubs and the Louvre seemed a painless answer to America's balance-of-payments dilemma. Tourists' dollars helped Europe pay its debts and the United States maintain its tariff. Herbert Hoover's Commerce Department noted happily that worldwide American tourist expenditures of $770 million in 1927 more than matched $714 million in war and private debt receipts.25 In addition to the financial dividend, tourism had a beneficial "political effect," American officials told the Germans, "leading to a normal resumption of relations" between the two nations.26

The flood of travelers generated resentment as well as dollars. Always the tourists' favorite, France in 1926 attracted foreigners who picked up bargains as the franc fell. Americans commonly asked waiters and shopkeepers "How much is that in real money?"27 A few even papered their train compartments or luggage with franc notes. Such insensitivity aggravated tensions over the war debt, and in July Paris erupted in several antiforeign, and especially anti-American, demonstrations. Both French and American officials tried to calm emotions. Calvin Coolidge balanced a rebuke of "bumptious" tourists with a warning that badly treated Americans would stay home.28 But probably the majority of visitors had pleasant tours that never made newspaper headlines—in any case, France remained the number one American tourist attraction in Europe. In 1929, the combined expenditure of American tourists and residents in France totaled over $137 million, creating an American economy in Paris.29 In the French capital one could be born in the American hospital, attend one of several American schools and churches, belong to the American Legion, the YMCA, the Cornell, Harvard, or American Women's Club; read one of three Parisian-American newspapers, in a favorite café or at the American Library; sip whiskey in the many American bars, drink milk delivered by American milkmen, eat sweet corn and ice cream produced by local Americans; go to hockey games, boxing matches, and other imported sport events; receive care from American dentists and doctors and be buried by an American undertaker.30 With fewer United States tourists or permanent residents, Berlin still supported an American church, student association, newspaper and, intermittently, chapters of the American Medical Association, Daughters of the American Revolution, and the Harvard Club.31

The forty thousand American residents in Paris created teaching, writing, and translating jobs that helped support expatriate artists. For American writers who matured in the decade after 1919, residence in Europe,
especially on the Left Bank in Paris, was almost an initiation rite. The city was "our 'university,'" Matthew Josephson recalled. The "lost" generation was on a quest for personal freedom and revitalized American art. Although many American writers, painters, and composers mocked Main Street's materialism, these largely middle-class sons and daughters did not entirely abandon its values. Most artists who sailed to Europe were confident in their own capabilities and in America's aesthetic potential. In Paris they found themselves, and they found European artists entranced by America's technocratic civilization. The fruit of this cultural cross-fertilization yielded, in such diverse artists as Ernest Hemingway, Gertrude Stein, and Virgil Thomson, a reaffirmation of their Yankee heritage and a recommitment to developing an indigenous American art of which they could be proud.

American artists in Europe seemed light-years away from the less colorful U.S. diplomats and bankers. Yet ties bound the two groups. Each was confident in the power of the individual and the potential of American development. Neither put much faith in political reform or politics generally, and this abnegation strengthened the status quo. The artists who left for Paris and the administration leaders who struggled for a policy of limited involvement in Europe each felt constrained by provincial America. Personal ties, not always harmonious, also linked artists with the business-governing elite. Writer and publisher Harry Crosby secured a position at Morgan et Cie. from Uncle J. P. Morgan and researched the poetic effects of hashish while guest of Cousin Joseph Grew, ambassador to Turkey. Another Crosby cousin, Walter Berry, won renown as an international lawyer and bibliophile and, as Edith Wharton's confidant and lover, inspired the novelist to new heights. Between his failed diplomacy of 1918–19 and ambassadorships to Moscow and Paris in the 1930s, William Bullitt married John Reed's widow and cultivated the friendship of artists. Banker Otto Kahn helped finance Hart Crane's The Bridge. Americans like preparations expert Fred Bate and International Chamber of Commerce official Lewis Galantière combined such Right Bank work with active encouragement of the artists on the Left.

In October 1918, Walter Damrosch, an officer in the AEF and former conductor of the New York Symphony, established a music school in France to train military band leaders. After the war, the Conservatoire américain continued to educate American composers. Damrosch hired Nadia Boulanger, a prominent French musician, who encouraged composers like Virgil Thomson to take pride in and develop their native musical traditions. Thomson was part of that generation of American composers, born between 1890 and 1910, which went to Paris in the 1920s. Like other artists, many were attracted by Europe's cheap prices.

Harold Loeb, the editor of a lavish literary magazine called Brood published inexpensively in Berlin, explained that "literature, as well as finance, is sensible to the trade balance." Encouraged by the United States government, Austria stabilized its currency in 1923, Germany in 1924, and France in 1926. While it reduced the dollar's extraordinary buying power, stabilization attracted American businessmen and tourists to Europe. This meant jobs for artists, especially in journalism. Warren Susman calculates that almost 70 percent of American expatriates in Paris gained at least a partial living from writing articles printed in the United States or Europe.

Loeb, Matthew Josephson, and other expatriates looked for inspiration from European artists. "Instead," Josephson recalled, I found "a young France that ... was passionately concerned with the civilization of the U.N.A., and stood in fair way to be Americanized." Other expatriates sharpened Europe's image of America as the land of technology and business. Assisted by Ezra Pound, George Anthel composed and conducted in Paris the Ballet Mécanique, an orchestration of nine machine-played pianos, electric bells, and a whirring airplane propeller. Gerald Murphy, a wealthy painter and a leader of the expatriate colony, chose such themes as machines and smokestacks. Ernest Hemingway, whose writing in the 1920s was translated into French, German, and Italian, embodied a work ethic as strong as Herbert Hoover's. Jake's parsimonious outlook in The Sun Also Rises, Hemingway's novel on expatriate life, paralleled American leaders' moral view of debts and currencies.

Anna Louise Strong, an American journalist in Moscow who helped establish the John Reed technical school for Russian youths, brought along her "Ford ... electric toaster, percolator, etc. etc."—for her own convenience and to "show the folks here American stuff." Although the expatriates' idiosyncrasies defied rigid categorization, most self-exiles were the figurative sons and daughters of General John Pershing, Henry Ford, and Herbert Hoover. America's business/machine civilization had provoked their rebellion, but America remained their cultural homeland just as surely as the culture of business suffused their art and thought.

Malcolm Cowley chronicled how these inadvertent "trade missionaries" stimulated, by their life-style, demand for American goods. A few expatriates urged more explicit ties between economic and cultural expansion. Walter Lowenfels argued that "American intellectuals must take their place beside the businessmen to guide the intellectual future of the world." F. Scott Fitzgerald also anticipated an imperial future. "Culture follows money," the novelist declared; "we will be the Romans in the next generation as the English are now."
The esthetic and business spheres intersected in other ways. Well-paying European audiences helped support black jazz bands. Europeans read American authors like Sinclair Lewis and Ernest Hemingway in part because they believed it essential to understand the giant across the Atlantic. In 1930, Lewis won the Nobel Prize in recognition both of his own abilities and America's coming of age.

Europeans often addressed American writing in terms of Yankee economic predominance. American poetry had "skyscraper creativity," a German reviewer wrote. A French analyst compared Hemingway's style to "modern buildings: girders and concrete"; another labeled it "the very essence of American genius ... reaching the first rank by jostling one's way to the fore." Whatever the metaphor, young Europeans hastened to copy the American novelist. A German critic remarked in 1932, "Young European authors write like Hemingway."

Hollywood Films

During the Great War, Hollywood invaded European and other world markets. YMCA representatives entertained Allied troops with American films, and the "movie habit" caught on among civilians and soldiers. In the 1920s, American films were an international box-office hit. Assured of the domestic market, which netted 60 percent of total world film revenue, Hollywood produced extravaganzas with which Europeans could not compete. By 1925, United States films made up 85 percent of the total shown in Britain, 60 percent of the total in Germany, 70 percent in France, 65 percent in Italy, and 95 percent in Australia and New Zealand. In Germany, the number of cinemas increased by 35 percent from 1920 to 1929, while the production dropped from 646 films to 175 films. Americans owned three-fourths of the most fashionable movie theatres in France. Hollywood's profits depended on foreign screenings, since domestic revenues covered only production costs, and frequently not even that.

"Trade follows the film," Americans and Europeans agreed. Greek appliance wholesalers and Brazilian furniture dealers found that their customers demanded goods like those pictured in the American movies. Although direct correlation between films and trade was hard to prove, Congress, parsimonious in most matters, established a Motion Picture Section in the Bureau of Foreign and Domestic Commerce in 1926. Bureau chief Julius Klein and his officials attested that United States films "stimulated the desire to own and use such garments, furnishing, utensils, and scientific innovations as are depicted on the screen." Will H. Hays, Hollywood czar, boasted of the power of these "silent salesmen of American goods."

American films not only sold United States goods, but, many Europeans feared, threatened independent national identity. "Americas has colonized us through the cinema," one Frenchman complained. Another French critic testified to the secularization of John Winthrop's city upon the hill: "Formerly US preachers ... deluged the world with pious brochures; their more cheerful offspring, who pursue the same ends, inundate it with blonde movie stars; whether as missionaries loaded with bibles or producers well supplied with films, the Americans are equally devoted to spreading the American way of life." Charles Pomaret, a member of the Chamber of Deputies, remarked that Europeans had become "gallley-slaves" to American finance and culture—appropriately, an image taken from the Hollywood hit *Ben-Hur*.

British groups worried that the many Hollywood films shown throughout the empire led to "American domination in the development of national character or characteristics." After a concerned speech by the Prince of Wales, the London *Morning Post* warned: "The film is to America what the flag was once to Britain. By its means Uncle Sam may hope some day, if he be not checked in time, to Americanize the world."

After 1925, Britain, Germany, and France tried to check the trend. Governments enacted measures to limit the number of imported Hollywood films and encourage domestic production. This policy diminished but did not eliminate Hollywood's dominance in Europe. Required by law to produce domestic films if they wanted to import the popular American ones, German and other European producers responded with "quota quickies," often subgrade efforts produced only to meet the letter of the law. American filmmakers circumvented the restrictions by investing in Europe, especially Germany. They imported European directors and performers and remained preeminent in world film exports. The State and Commerce departments vigorously supported Hollywood's diplomacy. In the late twenties film exporters faced a new danger, with talkies. How could they screen English-language movies in polyglot Europe? Hollywood responded with multilanguage production. In collaboration with a Berlin company, Paramount filmed *The Blue Angel* in English and German versions. In France, Paramount worked on an assembly-line basis: sixty-six features in twelve languages for the first year. Dubbed sound tracks helped, and by 1931 United States films had regained all but 10 percent of their 1927 market in England and Germany.

Hollywood films were a hit in Europe because they projected modern culture in a vivid and attractive light. Film embodied the era's emphasis on mechanical, simultaneous, and concentrated production. The message
was mass entertainment. As Adolf Behne, a German avant-gardist, recognized, "Film is... democratic. This has been recognized by the German masses, which flock to see Charlie Chaplin films." As the industry's global leaders, Hollywood producers had budgets large enough to pay for the casts of thousands and other spectacular effects calculated to please those masses. Finally, the films portrayed an image of life in fabulous America, the giant of the contemporary world and the pioneer of Europe's own future.

The American Impact on Europe

From Switzerland to the Soviet Union, Europeans acknowledged America's cultural leadership. "Mrs. Lenin," Anna Louise Strong reported from Moscow, "wants... American ideas on education through doing; manuals about... various things." Jean Paul Sartre reflected, "Skyscrapers... were the architecture of the future, just as the cinema was the art and jazz the music of the future." André Siegfried, a French sociologist, concluded that America had replaced Europe as "the driving force of the world."

American cultural influence probably went deeper in Germany than anywhere else in Europe. "Berlin Goes American," a journalist reported from the German capital, where cafeterias offered "griddle cakes mit syrup" and theatres featured Broadway hits. Germans, especially Berliners, eagerly borrowed almost anything American: shorter hemlines and hairdos, flapper styles, soda fountains, prizefights. Hollywood films, the Charleston, jazz. In the business and technological fields, many German industrialists, particularly the larger and more successful ones, adopted the efficient techniques of Henry Ford and Frederick Taylor. Other small businessmen, unable to install or compete with mass assembly lines, protested Germany's transformation. Some intellectuals and members of the middle class sided with the smaller entrepreneurs and defended the virtues of Volk, Kultur, and Heimat against the invasion of foreignness, functionalism, and modernity. The mania for things American became an issue in the sharp debate over Germany's future.

In this controversy many left-wing intellectuals and artists, particularly those of the neue Sachlichkeit or new objectivity school, embraced the technocratic vision of Americanism, but not for the same reasons as the industrialists. The businessmen sought greater productivity and profits, most of which they were unwilling to pass on to workers. The intellectuals and artists viewed increased efficiency and productivity as a vehicle toward greater social justice. Struggling to throw off the constraints of the past in art and architecture, many Germans—like the Frenchmen observing the AEF—admired the Americans' success, inventiveness, and practicality. Avant-garde Germans welcomed American mass culture as democratic and appropriate for the machine age. In designing new structures, some of which were built with American loans, German architects incorporated efficient design elements also borrowed from the United States, such as wall closets, folding beds, and self-service restaurants. Der Querschnitt, an avant-garde journal, interpreted jazz in terms of machinery: "Man became mechanical, rigorously ruled by a strict, rhythmically syncopating present, which call itself the jazzband." Germans made similar analogies in describing the fad for American synchronized dance troupes, such as the Tiller Girls. Siegfried Krakauer, Berlin cultural editor for the Frankfurter Zeitung, explained: "The Girls were artificially manufactured in the USA and exported to Europe... Not only were they American products; at the same time they demonstrated the greatness of American production... When they formed an undulating snake, they radiantly illustrated the virtues of the conveyor belt; when they tapped their feet in fast tempo, it sounded like business, business; when they kicked their legs high with mathematical precision, they joyously affirmed the progress of rationalization." Whether intentionally or not, Krakauer parodied German fascination with that factory upon the hill.

The strength of this appeal was demonstrated by left-wing artists' simultaneous allegiance to Americanism and bolshevism. Both paths offered an alternative to the discredited past; both promised a democratic, technocratic, peaceful, and abundant future. Especially during the years of the quasi-capitalistic New Economic Policy in Russia, the two paths appeared to some Europeans to merge into a single road. Indeed, the contrast in the early twenties between Russia's distress and America's success led some left-wing Germans like Bertolt Brecht to pick the Western route: "I am now very much against Bolshevism... universal service... rationing of food, control... I would like an automobile." Others adhered to bolshevism while also reaching for the Americanist dream. Maria Piscator recalled that her husband's Communist theatre group invented "America." Everything that was useful, effective, expedient, operative, performing properly and instrumental for productivity was called American. Even time had an American tempo... None of them had seen America... They admired what seemed real to them: the objective existence of the land of plenty, its material genius, with its prosperity, its slogans, and the great god—the machine. It is impossible to understand the complexity
of Epic Theatre without taking into account this capture of the imagination by America, while, at the same time, the period was idealistically entangled with the new Russia.  

Awkward Dominion

The Lindbergh Flight

Although the creator of the Epic Theatre admired American civilization for its efficient practicality, many other Europeans condemned it as cold, soulless, and repressive. Lindbergh excited and reassured Europeans because he had conquered the Atlantic with his machine and yet remained endearingly human, showing the world that mankind could enjoy technological progress and yet retain its soul. "Lucky Lindy's" feat met a tumultuous welcome in Europe, a reception that the hard-pressed State Department swiftly turned to diplomatic advantage.

In May 1927, Secretary of State Frank Kellogg characterized Franco-American relations as "bitter." 849 The year before, French resentment of the United States' war debt and foreign loan policy had exploded in anti-American demonstrations. Ill-feeling flared up again when Charles Nungesser and François Coli, popular French war heroes, disappeared in an attempted flight from Paris to New York. French newspapers charged, falsely, that the United States Weather Bureau had impeded Nungesser's takeoff by withholding meteorological reports. The French papers then printed as fact rumors of Nungesser's and Coli's New York arrival. Parisians rejoiced in the streets. Thousands massed at the Paris Herald office grew angry at the newspaper's refusal to acknowledge the French feat. When it became apparent that the arrival stories were false, Parisians demonstrated against newspapers in general and pulled down American flags. Ambassador Myron T. Herrick warned Washington of the "lamentable effect" of any American attempt for the transatlantic prize while Nungesser and Coli were still missing. 85

Despite Herrick's fears, more than one hundred thousand people massed at Le Bourget airport to witness Lindbergh's landing. Apprised of growing French excitement as the lone pilot's plane neared Paris, the ambassador saw the public relations potential of a transatlantic flight in a plane named after Louis IX. Although Lindbergh had made hotel reservations from New York, Herrick urged him to stay at the American Embassy, in order to lend the flight "official character." 86 Lindbergh's first visit outside the embassy was to Nungesser's mother, 87 and on behalf of "everybody in our country" he publicly mourned the disappearance of Nungesser and Coli. Coolidge's public cables to Lindbergh and to the French president also honored the lost pilots.

The French responded to Lindbergh's achievement, and his courtesy, with greater warmth than they offered "crowned heads or visiting potentates," Herrick enthused. The Foreign Office flew the American flag, the first time it had ever so saluted anyone not a head of state. 88 "Lindbergh's personal popularity," an embassy official informed Kellogg, "has been translated into popular enthusiasm for this country." 89 Now was the time to settle the tariff dispute that had soured Franco-American relations, he suggested. 90 The State Department encouraged the young pilot to accept invitations to Belgium and England. The Belgians honored him as they did only few heads of governments, and the British House of Commons gave him a standing ovation—the first, an embassy official reported, in British history. 91 American representatives accepted such adulation as America's due. "Thanks to Captain Lindbergh," one observed, "America has come into its own here." Europeans were "compelled," another reported, "to admit the genius of the American race." 92

The rhetoric with which Europeans praised the flight emphasized mankind's triumph over the natural world through use of the machine. Testimonials from such diverse groups as the Rumanian Ministry of War and the Marseilles Chamber of Commerce spoke of the pilot's "vanquishing the atmosphere" and "dominating space," his "conquest of the air" and "masterly off the wild forces of nature." A radio cantata by Bertolt Brecht and Kurt Weill, "Der Lindberghflug," sang of man's triumph over nature. Lindbergh had used a machine to overcome these "wild forces" and still emerged an independent individual—in fact, still a boy. Europeans applauded "the American people as a whole" for their youthful "audacity" and technical skills. Although the glory reflected on all mankind, it originated "in the American national ambition, whose propelling force carried Captain Lindbergh across the ocean.... This aeroplane was inspired with the ambition of the American nation, with the enthusiasm of Young America, with the spirit of enterprise of the young American, setting thereby an example to the whole of mankind." 93 This was an example Europeans took to heart.

The Sacco-Vanzetti Trial

Three months later, the execution of Sacco and Vanzetti stimulated equally impassioned European protest. 94 Although ethnicity figured in domestic reaction to the anarchists' trial, Europeans saw the issue in terms of the worldwide struggle between
revolution and capitalism. Conservative, liberal, and radical Europeans all agreed that America was the bulwark of capitalism and democracy. Could the United States contain radicalism and still retain its democratic tolerance? The question was of direct importance to the Europeans. If the powerful United States could not strike a moderate pose between reaction and revolution, how could Europe’s democracies hope to do so?

At first only European radicals protested the Massachusetts court decision. In late 1921, after the first guilty verdict, militants bombed four American diplomatic offices in Europe and demonstrated in front of several more. Police killed several Portuguese in a demonstration at the United States Consulate in Oporto. Rioters tore down American flags in Amsterdam, and Parisian workers roughed up American expatriates and tourists. United States diplomatic representatives received threats. If Sacco and Vanzetti were executed, one message warned, you “will also be a corpse.”

Dismissing the furor as Bolshevik agitation, the State Department reaffirmed the verdict’s justice and routed a threatening letter from Spain to the department’s Division of Russian Affairs. Washington prepared a defense of the verdict and asked diplomatic representatives to publicize it. The department asked the German government to ban films glorifying Sacco and Vanzetti.

In 1926 moderate and conservative Europeans joined the protest. Regardless of the anarchists’ guilt, influential individuals and newspapers argued, six years on Death Row was punishment enough. Some of the outcry simply vented resentment of what a Viennese financial newspaper termed America’s “arrogant preponderance.”

Many Europeans believed that the ideological issue had global relevance. Non-socialist labor groups feared that the United States had abandoned its liberal tradition. Conservatives “deplored” the sentence of execution, the consul in Brussels reported, because it “would furnish much ammunition to radical agitators everywhere.” Benito Mussolini, speaking personally as a “friend” of Ambassador Henry Fletcher and the American people, urged speedy clemency. The left’s agitation “throughout the world is increasing in intensity,” he warned. If Massachusetts prolonged the case and then did not execute, radicals would conclude that they had broken America’s resistance, and this could hurt United States “prestige.” Significantly, the Italian dictator viewed the issue as ideological rather than ethnic. Leniency, he argued, would point up the difference between Russia and America and “strike from the hands of the subversive elements an instrument of agitation.” Although the United States shared Mussolini’s anticomunism, its ideology stood closer to Europe’s small democracies. A prominent Danish newspaper concluded that “liberal” Europe saw its own social institutions at stake. Liberals feared that execution would undermine the “bourgeois ideals of humanity and justice. . . . By its whole bourgeois character [the American people] should be the opposite of and the bulwark against subversive tendencies which can send the world back to barbarism, a people for which we feel racial and cultural kinship. . . . If our faith in America’s ability to participate in the upholding of a common culture which has its roots in Western Europe is weakened our own hopes for the future of our own social culture are also weakened.” If America moved rightward to suppress revolution, how could such countries as Denmark keep to the middle road of tolerance?

What happened in America affected the whole world. The United States had become John Winthrop’s city upon the hill, though not for the religious reasons that he had expected, and Europeans could not avert their gaze. Whether they welcomed the prospect or dreaded it, most Europeans believed that American civilization portrayed the future course of their own societies. The United States was the metropolis, the hub of the modern cultural system, and Europe now figured as a satellite.

Stabilized by the Dawes Plan, Locarno, and the gold standard, Europe was a beckoning frontier for American business and cultural pioneers. Cultural and economic influence enhanced America’s prestige and thus the effectiveness of its economic, unofficial diplomacy. Yet ironically, the very success of the peaceful change and economic reconstruction policy created conditions which, by the late twenties, were undermining the new order.