Peculiarities of the American Political System
by W B Vosloo - Wollongong, March 2017

The American political system was consciously designed during the last quarter of the 18th century to embody the philosophy of liberal constitutional democracy. This philosophy included the notion that government must derive its authority from the consent of the governed; that the exercise of governmental authority is always subject to prescribed limits; and, that the prime obligation of a government is to protect man’s inherent individual rights to life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness.

The Founding Fathers, who designed the American Constitution, were a remarkable group of educated and well-read Englishmen who were conversant with the political theories and ideas current in the Anglo-Saxon world of their time. They were familiar with the writings of Thomas Hobbs, John Locke, Rousseau and Montesquieu. Amongst them were men who later held the office of President, Cabinet Member and Supreme Court Judge: Washington, Jefferson, Hamilton, Madison, Jay, Franklin, Adams, et al. They designed a system of government which contained a framework and operating principles that had never existed before anywhere in the world: separation of powers, checks and balances, federalism, a rigid written constitution and a bill of rights. It gave its citizens a better opportunity for freedom and self-expression than could be found anywhere else in the world.

Separation of Powers

The “separation of powers” theory is associated with Montesquieu, a French writer who visited England in the middle of the 18th century and observed that the independence of judges and the strength of Parliament in Britain compared favourably with the subordination of the judiciary to the French monarchy and the virtual extinction of the Estates-General. These observations led Montesquieu to conclude that there can be no liberty when legislative, executive and judicial powers are united in the same person or the same body of persons. The framers of the American constitution were profoundly influenced by Montesquieu’s argument and seemed to be determined to put it into practice – although it was not stated explicitly in the wording of the Constitution.

Checks and Balances

The Founding Fathers implemented the “separation of powers” in combination with another singular feature of the American political system: the system of “checks and balances”. Unless the members of the three branches co-operated harmoniously, none of the principal functions of government could be adequately performed. Under the system of checks and balances, the legislative power deliberates and decides about the making of general laws; the judiciary power (the courts) deliberates and decides about applying these general laws to particular cases; and, the executive power gives effect to the decisions of the other two branches. Each branch of the American government is limited in its lawful powers.

The Presidency

The American President and Vice-President are elected for a four-year term and the President is limited to two terms in office. The President and Vice-President are elected indirectly by an Electoral College where each state has a number of electors equal to the sum of its senators and congressmen. This arrangement favours the smaller states since even the smallest ones must have
at least two senators and one congressman. The electoral votes of the most populous states –
California, New York, Pennsylvania, Illinois, Texas and Michigan – account for the majority of the
members of the electoral college. The election of the President has in effect, more or less become the
result of a popular vote. Electors are usually pledged to vote for a particular candidate although it is
legally possible for a slate of electors to present itself “unpledged” to the voters. It is also legally
possible for an elector to break his/her pledge to the voters. In practice electors usually respect
their pledges.

It is important to note that the President is the only officer of the United States government elected
from a nationwide constituency. He is expected therefore to act as President of all the people.
However, the seven most populous states each includes a high concentration of minorities and since
the electoral college votes for each state must be cast as a unit, a presidential candidate must win or
lose each state as a whole. For winning he/she depends heavily on the turnout of the urban,
industrial and minority voters within it.

If a President dies in office, he is succeeded by the Vice-President. If both President and Vice-
President should die, the Speaker of the House would become President, and after him, succession
would go to the President pro tempore of the Senate and then to the Secretary of State, the Secretary
of the Treasury and the rest of the Cabinet.

The President fulfils many roles. He is “Commander-in-Chief”, the country’s “Bureaucrat-in-Chief” as
head of the executive branch in charge of millions of civilian employees and “Symbol of National
Unity”. He makes news by anything he does (or does not do). The President's power to define issues
and direct public attention covers not only domestic affairs, but stretches across the world. But the
President's powers are severely circumscribed. Allocating major amounts of money requires
congressional support; major appointments such as Cabinet posts and filling Supreme Court
vacancies require Senate approval. Presidential acts or decrees may be declared unconstitutional by
the courts. Beyond the courts, the President depends on the voluntary co-operation of his officials
and the people at large. Inescapably, the President is not all-powerful and much of his success
depends on his ability to recognise these limitations.

Judicial Review

Judicial review is a major channel of federal influence in the USA. It refers to the right and duty of
the courts to decide whether any law or act is valid under the Constitution. This power is not
stipulated in the Constitution but emerged as an interpretation or convention of the Constitution. In
no other country in the world has the Supreme Court as much power or recognition as in the USA.

Ever since 1800, with Chief Justice John Marshall’s opinion in the famous case of Marbury vs
Madison, the courts have acquired the right to review the executive acts of the federal and state
governments, and the laws of the national and state legislatures. By their practice of judging acts of
the legislative and executive branches of government in the light of the judges' understanding of the
Constitution, the courts have assumed an excessively powerful role. As a result, the Constitution is
what the judges say it is. Their latitude in interpreting the Constitution has led to a wide-ranging
body of “judge-made law”. As a result, the entire judiciary system has important powers over what
happens in government throughout the country. Over the years, the courts have thrown out several
acts of Congress and have declared illegal some major acts of the President, including some taken in the name of national security.

Supreme Court judges are appointed for life and cannot be removed against their will. But they are subject to “impeachment” by a majority of the House of Representatives and conviction by a two-thirds majority of the Senate. Vacancies in the Supreme Court are filled by the President with the “advice and consent of the Senate”. Removal power is rarely exercised so that most judges hold their offices for life.

Below the Supreme Court there is a network of national courts, federal district courts, federal courts of appeal and a number of trial courts – all arranged in a complex hierarchy of appeal from “inferior” to “superior” courts. All “federal judges” are appointed by the President with the approval of the Senate. The majority of “lower” judges are elected by the voting public and are subject to “recall” petitions signed by a designated number of voters asking for a special election to determine whether he/she should remain in office. Vacancies are then filled either by appointment or by special election. Popular election of judges has led to a frequent turnover among judges.

At both the national and the state levels in the USA, there is a clear separation of judges from prosecutors. The prosecuting function is vested in an executive agency headed by the Attorney General (appointed by the President) who supervises the work of a number of United States attorneys or district attorneys (for the state governments).

Whether judges “declare” rather than “make” law can be considered either a fiction, or a pretence, or a profound truth. History has shown that judges’ opinions tend to reflect those of their appointees. They tend to read their own political views into the Constitution. Persons who approve the political effects of a particular line of decisions usually defend the courts, while those who dislike those effects accuse the courts of improperly engaging in “judicial legislation”. Each interpretation necessarily favours the interests of some groups and damages the interest of others. The process by which the judge chooses one interpretation over the others is inevitably political in nature. It satisfies some values and frustrates others.

The Legislature

The US legislature is organised into two chambers. In the House of Representatives, the people are represented by one representative for every equal number of inhabitants as fixed by law. The congressmen are chosen directly by the people for two-year terms. Congressional districts are supposed to be re-adjusted, both within and among states, after each decennial census. The manner of adjustment within each state, like the qualifications for voting, is left to the state’s legislature, while the allocation of districts among states is entrusted to Congress. Prior to the 1960s, the re-adjustment of congressional districts was often neglected. Rural districts generally benefitted from this neglect because they did not have to share power with the faster growing urban areas. Redistricting (or legislative reapportionment) was mandated by the Supreme Court so that since the 1960s the over-representation of rural districts was curtailed. However, in congressional districts (rural or urban) dominated by a single ethnic group or political machine, a pattern of safe one-party representation developed. Legislators from such safe one-party districts get re-elected time after time and through the congressional custom of seniority (which allocates committee chairmanships to legislators with the longest continuous term of service) they dominate the important committees of the House and thereby much of the legislative business.
The Senate was designed to serve as a counterweight to the House. Selected for six years and with the election of one-third of senators staggered every two years, the Senate was expected to have a greater measure of stability and independence. Originally the senators were elected indirectly by the legislatures of their states, but in 1912 the Seventeenth Amendment to the Constitution changed this to direct election of the majority of voters registered in each state. Representing the states equally, regardless of population, the Senate is more sensitive to regional interests.

The practise of “filibustering” dates back to 1825 and allows a senator, or group of senators, to speak at inordinate length. The real basis of the filibuster is the tolerance of the majority whose members usually refrain from voting cloture, i.e. ending the debate and bringing the matter to a vote. In recent years, the majority needed for cloture has been reduced to a bare majority. Generally speaking, senators are subject to a larger variety of ethnic groups, economic interests and independents than congressmen. Their prestige has usually been higher.

Passing legislation in both branches of Congress involves bargaining, compromise and “logrolling” (reciprocating favours). The bulk of Congressional work is done in a myriad of Congressional Committees, compromising and logrolling until a working majority coalition emerges. Through formal hearings, Congress ropes in diverse interest groups across the nation.

On the national level the activities within the Congressional Committee structure are dominated by the two parties. Republicans and Democrats compete to lead proceedings and to control its output. On the state level, bicameral legislatures are also the rule. The political machines that are entrenched on the national level are also entrenched at the state, county and municipal levels. The major political parties are essentially federations of state party organisations. Each national party critically depends on influence and patronage within each state.

The parties depend for their financing on donations. As the story goes, “copper from the rank and file, silver from those who hate the opposition and gold from those who want something from the winner”.

**Political Parties**

Political parties made their appearance in the 19th century in the wake of the extension of the franchise. What the framers of the Constitution had trisected and put asunder, the political parties re-united. Jobs in public offices were considered the spoils of political warfare. These were to be looted after an electoral victory and used to grease the party machine.

The parties seek control of the senior levels of the civil service and the judiciary. The parties determine the selection of candidates and ensure the support of the voters. The capture of all the elective posts in the executive and judicial branches is achieved through the electoral system where the parties obtain a firm grip on nominating procedures and methods of balloting. It remains a perennial challenge to keep political spoils-men and partisans at bay through security of tenure and appointment by merit in the civil service. In the modern state, most of the work has to be accomplished by party and civil service together.
Party Affiliations

The Democratic Party and the Republican Party both try to draw at least some electoral support from every major ethnic, occupation, religious, economic and educational group in an effort to act as “brokers” for the widest possible support base. Nevertheless, the Republican and Democratic parties both have had a fairly rigid core of supporters over many decades. The Republicans can traditionally count on the support of the following groups: WASPS (White Anglo-Saxon Protestants), farmers, small town dwellers, professionals and corporate business leaders. The Democratic Party is traditionally supported by trade union members, the working class generally, big city dwellers, minority groups, African Americans, Jews, leftist “intellectuals” in universities and the media. Historically, the Southern States used to be essentially a Democratic Party power base, but in recent decades it has changed towards the predominant political divisions elsewhere in the country.

Recent Changes

During the past century, American government has been undergoing two major changes: First, the constant expansion of central government functions in about every conceivable aspect of human life from cradle to grave; second, the steady growth in the importance of the presidency, nationally and internationally. The presidency has become the principal policy-making agency. Big government has resulted in a strong executive. The political executive has replaced the legislature as the central policy-making agency.

Countervailing Powers

The American “Establishment” consists of several power centres: the world of finance, the industrial corporations, the law firms, the military complex and the information and communication services. The latter include major newspaper chains, news agencies (AP and UPI) and the major television and radio networks such as NBC, CBS, ABC, CNN and Fox News. Jointly these groups form the core of the establishment. The major foundations and a number of prestigious private and public universities could be looked upon as constituting the fringe of the “establishment”.

In addition to these components of the “establishment”, special regard must be had to the power of “special interests”. These conglomerates include the aircraft and electronics industries, the tobacco industry, oil companies, mineral interests, large-scale farming interests, the railroads, heavy construction and urban redevelopment industries, labour unions. On some matters, special interest groups usually form shifting coalitions. In Washington DC, thousands of special interest agents are employed to lobby on behalf of the special interest groups.

The political coalitions among special interest groups change from issue to issue, they generally coalesce to promote legislation or special protective measures. Pressure groups representing Black people (Negroes) have also grown in prominence since the 1960s. Labour as a social stratum has declined in influence since the 1960s – particularly production-line labour. These “forgotten Americans” are the 20 percent who are poor and the 10 percent who are very poor. The inequality in income, status and power is greater in the United States than in other advanced industrial countries. Some of the poor are the city-black, but more than half of the very poor are not black – e.g. in Appalachia, but also in the poor neighbourhoods of industrial areas such as Chicago and Detroit and parts of Pennsylvania.
Apart from the poor, there is also a further group which is not so poor, but still forgotten. They are the hardworking whites at the fringe of poverty who live in fear of losing their jobs as a result of factories closing to be moved to Mexico and elsewhere abroad.

A further “forgotten” group is the so-called “mobile disenfranchised”. This group includes students and other young unemployed people. These people are often not registered to vote but are prone to take part in protest marches – some organised and financed by George Soros through his New York-based OSI (Open Society Institute). Soros, a Hungarian Jew by birth, annually spends hundreds of millions to finance projects across the USA, Africa and Eastern Europe.

Values and Belief Systems

A large proportion – as high as 70 percent of Americans – claim to be "traditionalists", holding "old-fashioned" values relating to family, marriage, patriotism and religion. At the other end of the spectrum are the "secular rationalists" who are less concerned about religion and patriotism, who are predominantly single, tolerant, hedonistic, secular and multicultural. These value orientations are probably better predictors of political affiliation than wealth and income. Traditionalists live largely in the "red" states encompassing the mid-west and the south. Secularists live on the densely populated Pacific coast, the eastern seaboard and in the north-eastern and upper mid-western "blue" states. Traditionalists are heavily concentrated in smaller towns and rural areas and tend to watch Fox TV channels. Secularists dominate big cities. Multiculturalism is deeply entrenched in "blue" states and they prefer CNN, ABC, NBC, CBS, the New York Times, the Washington Post and the Los Angeles Times as their sources of news.

The states with the highest levels of immigration of Latinos and Asians are New York, New Jersey, New Mexico and California. These are considered as new "melting pots" and they tend to vote predominantly for the Democratic Party. The long-term trend of the US population is increasingly non-Western in complexion and value orientation.

"Melting Pot" Profile

With few exceptions, all Americans are descendants of immigrants. For around four centuries prior to World War II, North America ranked as a major destination not only from the British Isles, but also from other countries on the European continent. Hence, the USA is often referred to as the most obvious example of a “melting pot” nation. But it is of great importance to bear in mind that the receptacle in which all the various groups were “melted”, was an “Anglo-Saxon” receptacle – not “Latin” or “African” or "Asian". America would not have been the country it has become if it had been settled in the 17th and 18th centuries, not by British protestants, but by French, Spanish or Portuguese Catholics. It would have been closer to Quebec, Mexico, Brazil, Venezuela or Cuba.

Among the key elements of the Anglo-Protestant founding culture are the English language, a Christian religious commitment, English concepts of the rule of law, the responsibility of rulers to their subjects, the rights of individuals, and the belief that humans have the ability and duty to create a heaven on earth. That culture has evolved and been amended by the contribution of subsequent immigrants and generations, but its essentials remain. This culture is also the primary source of the principles of the American creed, which Jefferson set forth in the Declaration of Independence and which has been articulated by American leaders from the Founders to the present day.
Throughout its early period, the United States distinguished between "preferred", "non-preferred" and "other" countries in its immigration policies. The "preferred" immigrants were those from Great Britain and Western Europe. The "non-preferred" were those from Central and Eastern Europe and they were admitted only if they proposed to be agricultural workers or domestic servants. Immigrants from the "other" nations were admitted only by special permits.

The ethnic composition of immigrants into the USA up to World War II was as follows:
British 11.1 percent, Irish 11.6 percent, Canadian 8.0 percent, German 15.6 percent, Scandinavian 6.2 percent, Austro-Hungarian 10.5 percent, Russian 8.5 percent, Italian 12.0 percent, Other 16.5 percent.

Prior to World War II, Europe supplied most of the world's immigrants for a period of four centuries. During this period about 70 million Europeans moved to the Americas, Oceania and Africa. Between 1820 and 1940 a total of 38,290,443 persons were admitted as immigrants into the USA. They came in three great waves: the first, from 1920 to 1890, consisted mainly of persons from Great Britain, Ireland, Germany and Scandinavia; the second, 1890 to 1920, was made up principally of immigrants from Central and Eastern Europe, particularly from Italy, Austria-Hungary and Russia; and, the third, from 1920 to 1940 largely from Italy, Canada and Mexico and refugees from Germany and Italy.

On a tablet at the base of the Statue of Liberty, in New York Harbour, these words are engraved: "Give me your tired, your poor, your huddled masses yearning to be free"
These poetic words described the immigration policy followed by the USA during the first century of its national existence. During the period 1783 to 1882, the national government freely admitted all foreigners from Europe to settle in the USA and even offered inducements.

After the Civil War in the 1860s, the American Federation of Labour sought to restrict immigration in an effort to reduce competition from cheap foreign labour, especially from Chinese who had been brought in the 1860s and 1870s to help build the western railroads. As a result, Congress enacted the Chinese Exclusion Act in 1882 and also prohibited the entry of such undesirable aliens as paupers, lunatics and criminals.

The period 1881 to 1920 produced the heaviest volume of immigrants in the American history – a total of 23,465,374, primarily from Central and Eastern Europe. From 1890 on an increasing number of Americans pressed for the adoption of a system of regulations that would not only drastically restrict the total number of immigrants but would also maintain the predominance of Western and North European influence in the national population. In 1921 Congress enacted the national-origins quota system that was the basis of the American immigration policy for the next forty years. The system placed limitations on the total number of immigrants and set a quota for each immigrant-sending nation. Each nation's quota was set at the same percentage of the total number of immigrants as its percentage was of the total American population in the 1920 Census.

The McCarran-Walter Act of 1952 was meant to liberalise immigration policy. It abolished all previous exclusions of immigrants from Asian nations, permitting alien husbands, wives and minor children of American citizens to enter outside the quotas assigned to their native countries. However, it retained the basic machinery of the national-origins quota system. President Truman vetoed the Act on account of its discriminatory effect, but congress passed it over his veto.
The national-origins quota system came under increasing fire after 1952. Presidents Truman, Eisenhower and Kennedy all tried in vain to repeal the existing restrictive laws. But in 1965 President Johnson persuaded Congress to eliminate the national-origins quota system and authorised the admission of up to 350,000 immigrants per year and placed a ceiling of 20,000 per year on immigrants from any one country and a ceiling of 120,000 on immigrants from all Latin American countries. It also established a system of preferential admissions favouring persons with close relatives already in the United States and persons with special skills, talents or education needed in the country. The Johnson changes were enacted in the Immigration Act of 1965.

**Undocumented / Illegal Migrants**

The USA is said to currently accommodate around 11 million “undocumented” or “illegal” migrants. Many are parents of American-born children who have been in America for at least 5 years or are people who arrived in America as children. The question of adjusting the immigration policy to handle this delicate problem is a major bone of contention between Democrats and Republicans. What is lacking is a consensus-based path to citizenship (or permanent residency) for tax-paying, law-abiding residents, equal access to benefits and government services and the loosening of quotas for highly skilled immigrants. The Republicans give preference to tightening border security while Democrats prefer a pathway to citizenship for illegal immigrants who would likely be Democratic Party supporters. As a result immigration policy has become a major party-political battle.

A large proportion of the voting public consider the bulk of the illegal migrants to be “border jumpers”, “visa fraudsters” and “phony asylum seekers”. They are seen as a burden on native-born taxpayers. Many taxpayers see the waves of immigrants from Latin America across the southern border and from trouble spots in the Middle East and Africa as undesirable and undermining the peculiar “melting pot” identity of the USA. These waves of immigrants are seen to have a negative impact on America’s “melting pot” profile – particularly participation levels in welfare benefits, the level of social cohesion and the rise of multicultural resistance to assimilation. Welfare dependency has been steadily climbing.

**Multiculturalism and the Future**

During the period 1990-2010, about 16 million people entered the USA legally. Currently the country is home to between 30 and 40 million people who were born abroad – about one in ten. It is not clear how many of these are legal migrants. This trend arouses anxieties – particularly about the Hispanic wave rolling in from Mexico. On the one hand is the “Anglo-Protestant-African-Catholic-Indian-German-Irish-Jewish-Italian-Slavic-Asian part of society”. On the other hand, is the Spanish-speaking sub-group which is growing unusually fast and is continually fed by the country next door through the porous border. Moreover, the majority of Hispanics are under 30, which implies high birth rates.

The Census Bureau forecasts that by 2050 the Hispanic population will have increased by 200 percent, the population as a whole by 50 percent and the whites by 30 percent. Hispanics will then constitute 25 percent of the total population and be concentrated in New York, Los Angeles, San Francisco, Chicago and Miami.
Ethnic Composition of the USA Population

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<th>Ethnicity</th>
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<th>2030 projection</th>
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<td>%</td>
<td>(364 million)</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>White non-Hispanic</td>
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Some studies have found that Hispanics, just as other earlier waves of immigrants, are gradually assimilating into the American culture and language and moving into the mainstream. There is also evidence of growing inter-marriages between Hispanics and other settled communities. American mixed marriages, which were one in twenty-three in 1990, have subsequently increased to one in fifteen. Nearly half of all the 3.7 million inter-racial marriages in the USA, today have one Hispanic partner.

In view of the large inflow of non-Protestant and non-British immigrants, it is to be expected that America's founding Anglo-Protestant culture will undergo profound changes in coming years. The definition of “Americanism” is in the process of being broadened. Many Catholics dislike being told that Protestantism is the source of the country's dynamism. Likewise, the rapidly expanding assortment of non-Anglos dislike any hint that they are less than fully American. But the “melting pot” itself is still of a recognisable Anglo-Protestant design. The idea that anything is possible if you work hard enough, is an enduringly popular part of the American Dream. But can the ladder of success be climbed by all?

Emerging Stratification Patterns

During the past three decades, the rich have been doing better than the less well-off. Since 1979 median family incomes have risen by 18 percent, but the incomes of the top 1 percent (Wall Street financiers?) have gone up by 200 percent. In terms of the total national income the bottom fifth's income has declined in comparison with the top fifth. The top 0.1 percent of Americans also earn two to three times as much as their peers in Britain and France. However, analysis of the position of the poorer echelons in relation to the upper echelons, not in relative terms but in absolute terms, indicates that a smaller share of the total population is living in poverty than before. The rising tide seems to have lifted dinghies as well as yachts.

Americans seem to mind more about equality of opportunity then equality of results. Most Americans feel their chances of moving up a notch have improved over the past 30 years and say that their standard of living is higher than that of their parents. But social mobility is eroded by fundamental changes in the economy. This is brought about by increased rewards for intellectual skills. As a result, the income gap between college graduates and those without degrees has constantly increased over the past 30 years. Lifetime employment is out and job-hopping is in. Today almost all chief executives have a higher college degree such as an MBA. Persons with an Ivy League university degree are more likely to move up the income bracket than those without.

These changes indicate growing trends of stratification based on education: an education-based meritocracy. But the rise in the cost of education has put "Ivy League" universities out of reach of
most middle-class and poor families. The median income of families with children at Harvard is $150,000 p.a. The trends are that students from the richest quarter of the population are increasing their share of places at America's elite universities.

But even outside elite schools, students from poor backgrounds are losing ground. The underlying causes are not easily neutralised because it deals with family behaviour. The Brookings Institution claims that a person's chances of a good education, good job and good prospects – i.e. of moving upwards – are partly determined by family behaviour. On this view, the rich really are different, not just because they have more money. It also depends on the structure of the family itself. In other words, class stratification is more than a matter of income or inherited wealth. Children from stable, dedicated families, on average, have a better chance to succeed than children who are neglected by parents, who are out of wedlock and without jobs. If the key to upward mobility is finishing your education, having a job and getting and staying married, then the rich in stable families start with advantages that go beyond money.

While the populations of many countries in Europe and Japan are ageing and on the verge of shrinking, the USA population is gaining annually by almost 10 percent – a rate that is adding the population of Chicago every year. Immigration levels over the past 20 years have constantly risen to just over 1 million per annum. The bulk arrive from Latin America and Asia and they tend to have children at a far more prodigious rate than either white or black groups. The median age of the USA sustained by this young and fertile immigrant population will remain at 35 for the next 50 years in contrast to the European median age where it will rise from 41 to 53. In the second half of the 21st century, whites in the USA of European origin will be in a minority.

America’s fertility rate is 60 percent higher than Japan’s and 40 percent higher than the European average. It is taking in immigrants at a faster rate than Europe and doing better in assimilating them. America will be the only big developed country where children outnumber pensioners and one of the few developed countries where the working-age population is still growing. Hence, America is likely to remain relatively young and dynamic.

American society has been subject to important shifts in occupation and residence over the past half century: away from agriculture, small towns and rural neighbourhoods towards urban employment in industries and services in urban neighbourhoods. Around 80 percent now live in cities, towns and suburbs, making use of mass media as a source of information. These shifts also meant a large movement from the rural black South into the central cities of the North.

The educational level of the American people has also changed radically: from grade school, to high school and to college. Sources of news shifted from newspapers to television. There are twice as many voters over fifty years of age than under thirty. This pattern implies that there are more potentially conservative voters than “progressives”. Millions of black Americans have become aroused to political concern and participation and so have large parts of another previously passive group – the young. The political system has accepted a wider range of responsibilities: medical care, public aid to low-rent housing, broader voter registration. Race segregation in public schools has been abolished.

The domestic experience of the United States has much to offer the rest of the world: its emphasis on equality and mobility, its interest in discovery and practical solutions to human problems and its creation of avenues of upwards mobility for the bulk of its population.
Concluding Remarks

1. Few countries can equal the growth patterns and dynamism that the USA has exemplified to date. The quality and quantity of intellectual life has been the highest in the world for many decades. A quarter of American adults have a university education. The country produces one-third of the world’s scientific papers, employs two-thirds of the world’s Nobel-prize winners and has the majority of the world’s top 20 universities. The average American (in terms of GDP per person measured in purchasing power parity) is about 30 percent better off than the average person in the EU area. However, Americans clock up about 40 percent more hours than the average person in Germany, France and Italy.

2. The country’s size and wealth, combined with its meritocratic traditions and technological prowess, have made it easier for Americans to explore new opportunities. As a dynamic society, America has been remarkably open to trade for many decades. The USA has for decades served the largest market in the world for major exporters like Japan, Taiwan, China and EU countries. Without the American market, these countries would not have been able to grow so spectacularly since World War II.

3. The United States has gone further than any democratic country in allowing an unelected judiciary to determine the constitutionality of legislative and executive governmental acts. However, such judicial determinations cannot be regarded as sacred expressions of the eternal principles of right and wrong. They are part and parcel of the political process. They depend on the judges’ understanding of the Constitution. This understanding is heavily clouded by their own political allegiances. Sometimes the courts have acted as instruments of change. At other times, they represented some of the more enduring values of American society. In the long run, Court decisions require the backing of the people if they are to be effective. Yet, it is amazing that a collection of unelected individuals is allowed by constitutional convention to acquire such an enormous sphere of influence.

4. It would seem that the absorption of clusters of foreign migrants becomes sensitive when their numbers approach or exceed 10 percent of the population. Such clusters of immigrants usually become problematic when sub-national group formation of “in” groups and “out” groups revolve around clear-cut cleavages such as religion, race, ethnicity, culture, class or physical stock. These clusters of immigrants undermine social cohesion and a sense of national identity. Ideally, immigrants should blend seamlessly into the host country. If not, they are likely to become a source of domestic conflict. If immigration policy becomes a major party-political battle, a country becomes polarised into sub-national antagonistic groups. It would be preferable if the focus of attention could be shifted to finding ways how immigration could help to overcome major societal problems such as expanding the productive labour force, encouraging investment and expanding the number of taxpayers in relation to the growing ranks of grey-haired “tax takers”. New entry routes must be created for immigrants with skills, experience and education. If “El Dorado” seekers can easily cross a country’s borders, they will keep coming in growing numbers. This is especially applicable to the USA’s porous border of around 2,000 miles (of which only 700 miles is already walled/fenced) separating it from a Latin America encompassing 30 countries with a combined population of around 600 million – with a population structure of around 30 percent white, 50 percent mixed, 5 percent black and 15 percent Amerindian.
5. Whereas the USA and Canada developed initially within an Anglo-Saxon cultural environment, Latin American development took place in an Iberian controlled cultural environment in which the principles of constitutional liberal democracy only took root late in the 20th century. Latin America as a whole has been left behind in terms of development momentum based on productivity growth. The Latin American region will remain left behind comparatively speaking unless corrupt governments, inefficient bureaucracies and organised crime are significantly brought under control.

6. The American political system has produced the world’s oldest continuous democracy. It has provided a template for the free world. It rescued Europe from total military destruction during the two World Wars and from socio-economic implosion during the Cold War period lasting from 1945 to 1989. The USA is also a land of contrasts. It has amongst the highest per capita incomes in the world, but also the highest rate of imprisonment in the world. It has more elective offices than any other but also one of the lowest voter turnouts. It has one of the lowest tax rates among the rich countries, the least generous public services, the highest military spending, most lawyers per capita, the highest proportion of young people at university, the most persistent work ethic and a strong belief in personal responsibility and self-reliance. According to a recent attitude survey, 57 percent of Americans think that success is determined by forces within their control, whereas only 31 percent of Germans say the same. America is still one of the last bastions of resistance to the creeping growth of government provision. Abraham Lincoln once said, “America is the last, best hope on earth”. Today, most Americans still support the ideal of America as the best hope of all mankind.