

Key American Developments

Paul: Well, Martin, for us people living outside the United States, who only occasionally have been there perhaps, we tend to get inundated with the trivia, you might say, of everyday events, the names of politicians, pop-artists, sportsmen, and so on, and we lose sight of the long term trends and developments that are really important in the development of the United States. If we look at the last fifty years, or so, let's say, since the Second World War anyway, what would you say are the two, or three, most important long term developments in your country?

Martin: Well, Paul, I can understand your feeling of not getting an overview of what's going on, because there's so much about the United States that's constantly coming at you through the media all the time, and all those little news stories along the way, but if you ask me, and I should sit back and think about it, I think maybe three things come out, as it were.

Paul: Tell me what they are, Martin.

Martin: Well, first I'd say that the development of the United States as the superpower of the world, and that began after World War II, and remember, the United States wasn't even much engaged in the world before that, it was isolated, and had a policy of not becoming engaged, but suddenly after World War II the United States becomes *the* superpower, and at first it has the opponent; The Soviet Union, but then since the nineties there's been no opponent at all. So, now it sits there as far and away the greatest single military power, as well as being the greatest economy, and maybe the military is the thing that people most notice, of course.

Paul: People outside the States?

Martin: Yes, I think so. I mean, particularly recently with its bruting about its power that way, and using it in Irak. In fact, if the United States... I if you take the United States defense budget, and compare it to what other people are spending on defense, in other nations in the world, you could actually take all the money that all other countries in the world are using, and you still wouldn't have as much money as the United States is using in 2004. So, that is... that's a great... very great amount of power that it has there, and that's very visible I think. Another thing, I would say, is the term that America has had since World War II, when it first appeared on the international stage. From being, I think what was thought of as a rather liberal power, liberal nation, or at least in the American terms of liberal politics.

Paul: You mean abroad? America internationally?

Martin: No, I'm thinking more of it domestically now, I think it was perceived of with people like Kennedy, for example, as being a rather liberal, international power, and I think that over the last twenty years or so, since Ronald Reagan in the nineteen eighties, America has become more conservative in its politics. Simply, I think people view it

like that, and I think it's true too.

Paul: Is there an underlying reason for this?

Martin: Probably the most important reason is that most people in the United States now live in the South or the West of the country, and that has always been a more conservative area, both areas, and in the South this has meant that the southern conservative forms of religion have also become much more prominent in America. Bush, for example, comes from Texas, and he is a born-again Christian, like many others. So, I think that the world has seen the United States become, at least to seem to become, more religious, or more evangelical, I think the word is.

Paul: And this expresses itself in foreign policy for example?

Martin: Well, some people will say so, yes, I mean, certainly, when we... When people accuse the United States of going on a crusade, there's that implication that it's a Christian crusade against, for example, the Muslim World, which is a terrible thought, of course.

Paul: You say more people now live in the South and the West, you almost make it sound as if the North and the East are empty? Which can't be true?

Martin: No, not, not so, of course, there's today, in the latest count there's about two hundred and ninety million Americans, so there's enough to go around, and a goodly portion of them still live in the North-East and what's called the Mid-West. My point, was that a majority, something I think around fifty five percent now, of the American population lives in the South and the West, and that's new, that's happened over the last twenty, twenty five years, and that has changed the political composition of America.

Paul: Right, I see, and your third long term development, Martin?

Martin: Well, that I would call the well known, and well recognized, consumer economy. We had a period in the nineteen twenties in America where we had what was called "the Roaring Twenties," and that was when we first began to develop what could be called the consumer economy. An economy that runs on basis of people buying massive amounts of things, but it really didn't take off until the nineteen fifties, and that is really the America of McDonald's, and blue jeans, and pop records, and constant new inventions, and this idea that you should never be satisfied, that you should always have something more, and that there's always something new that's going to make you happy; instant gratification.

Paul: And this America is in our own high streets in Europe, of course...

Martin: Of course, that's why I mentioned that I think that it's made a tremendous impression around the world. Where can you not go when you can't walk to your local McDonald's? Is the obvious example, and of course, this is also... We've gotten a reaction against it by people who go, when they're protesting against the United States, exactly to the McDonald's, because they realize this is part of that consumer economy. I think that,

that ,of course, is one of the reasons that we've gotten such strong reactions from other countries and other cultures, they feel as if we've come like a tidal wave, washing over them.

Paul: Threatened...

Martin: Threatened, I think, threatened.

Paul: Well, we'll watch out in the future. Thank you very much for telling us about these developments.

Martin: My pleasure.