



The Engelsberg Seminar 2009



On the Idea of America

June 11th to 13th 2009
at Avesta Manor, Sweden

A SEMINAR ARRANGED BY
AXEL AND MARGARET AX:SON JOHNSON FOUNDATION

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On the Idea of America

What is the origin of 'the American idea,' how has it been shaped by history, and where is it headed? The fate of the US is inextricably linked to Europe, and its inhabitants are without a doubt Europe's most successful colonists. As early as the late 18th century, Americans had liberated themselves from the modern nation of Great Britain and through clever moves managed gradually to eliminate competing colonial powers in North America; for instance, Louisiana was purchased from France and Alaska from Russia, the Spanish were expelled in 1898, and only a weak Canada remained under the British crown.

America became the home of freedom, especially religious freedom, a place of refuge for those who were persecuted for their beliefs, and the country of free enterprise. Not only that – as the historian Thomas P. Hughes writes in *American Genesis*, ““Men and women assumed, as never before, that they had the power to create a world of their own design.””

The US was already on par with Britain in many respects by around 1900, but it was the mistakes that the Europeans themselves made, in the form of the First and Second World War, that prepared the ground for the US, allowing it to become a real global power. After the collapse of the Soviet Union, the US finally emerged as the undisputed winner of the Cold War. Despite America's positive self-image, the world has never really perceived American ambitions in the same way as the US evidently does. Instead of being seen as a liberator, the US rather has in general been viewed, since the Vietnam War, as imperialist nation acting in sheer self-interest.

Today, following America's efforts in Iraq, which have been less than successful and have had little backing, and with a financial crisis predominating in the midst of a recession, there are once again suggestions, like during the 1980s, that the American Era is over: back then, it was Japan; today it is China and India that is considered to probably take over from the US.

Also, do a low starting point and a large population in truth guarantee a global shift in power as Fareed Zakaria writes in *The Post-American World*, and is it ““an accident of history”” that small countries have historically been more successful than large ones is creating prosperity?

What are the founding myths of the United States, how have the Puritans and the idea of the New World shaped American history and the country's destiny, and how are these reflected in the American Constitution and present-day politics? How have key events in American history, like the American Civil War, the 1898 Spanish-American War, FDR and the New Deal, the First and Second World War, Korea, Vietnam etc., influenced the American idea?

Furthermore, how does the influence of American national myths colour today's American national consciousness, and how is this reflected in the American economy, in literature, art, and film? How is the idea of America reflected in the country's reputation around the globe?

Are we beginning to see the beginning of the end or is it still only the beginning of the expansion of the American idea and the American era?

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Friday 12th of June

The Soft Power of the US and the Politics of Modernisation

9.00 a.m.	Reinhold Wagnleitner	The Empire of Fun
9.25 a.m.	David Ellwood	America and the Politics of Modernisation in Europe
9.50 a.m.	Panel Discussion	
10.15 a.m.	<i>COFFEE BREAK</i>	

Aspects of American Nationalism

10.40 a.m.	Anatol Lieven	American Nationalism: Sleeping or Dead
11.05 a.m.	Godfrey Hodgson	American Exceptionalism
11.30 a.m.	James Carroll	Messiah Nation
11.55 a.m.	Panel Discussion	
12.30 p.m.	<i>LUNCH</i>	

Perspectives on the Idea of America

2.30 p.m.	Deepak Lal	The View from India
2.55 p.m.	Jong-Yil Ra	The View from Korea
3.20 p.m.	Peter Baldwin	A Reality Check
3.45 p.m.	Panel Discussion	
4.10 p.m.	<i>TEA</i>	

The Influence of the US Economy

4.40 p.m.	Robert J. Shapiro	American Markets
5.05 p.m.	Oliver Kamm	On the Decline of the US Influence in Global Markets
5.30 p.m.	Edward Luce	On the Continuing Power of the US Economy
5.55 p.m.	Panel Discussion	
6.20 p.m.	<i>DRINKS</i>	
7.00 p.m.	<i>DINNER and MUSIC</i>	

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Saturday 13th of June

The Future of the Idea of America

9.00 a.m.	Göran Rosenberg	Is the Future of the American Idea Possible?
9.25 a.m.	Anders Stephanson	America as the End of History
09.50 a.m.	Alan Wolfe	The Future of Liberal Interventionism
10.15 a.m.	<i>COFFEE BREAK</i>	
10.45 a.m.	Peter Beinart	The Solvency Doctrine: Understanding Obama's Foreign Policy
11.10 a.m.	Oliver Kamm	The US and Europe: How Not to Improve Relations
11.35 a.m.	Douglas Murray	Interventionism Post-Iraq
12.00 a.m.	Panel Discussion	
12.25 p.m.	<i>LUNCH</i>	

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Lecturers and Moderator

Peter Baldwin

Professor, UCLA, USA

Peter Beinart

Senior Fellow, Council of Foreign relations,
UK

Kathleen Burk

Professor, University College London, UK

David Ellwood

Associate Professor, University of Bologna,
Italy

Godfrey Hodgson

Journalist and Historian, UK

Jong-Yil Ra

President, Woosuk University, South Korea

Oliver Kamm

Leader Writer, The Times, UK

Deepak Lal

Professor, UCLA, USA

Anatol Lieven

Professor, King's College London, UK

John Lloyd

Director, Reuters Institute, Oxford, UK

Edward Luce Bureau Chief, Financial
Times, Washington, USA

Pauline Maier Professor, MIT, USA

Douglas Murray

Author, Director, Centre for Social
Cohesion, UK

David Reynolds

Professor, Cambridge University, UK

Philippe Roger

Research Program Director, CNRS, France

Göran Rosenberg

Writer, Sweden

Robert J Shapiro

Chairman and co-founder, Sonecon, Ilc,
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Anders Stephanson

Professor, Columbia University, USA

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Associate Professor, Salzburg University,
Austria

Daniel Walker Howe

Professor Emeritus, Oxford University &
UCLA, USA

Alan Wolfe

Professor, Boston College, USA

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Reference Group

Kurt Almqvist, Ax:son Johnson Foundation

Rolf Ekéus, Ax:son Johnson Foundation

Thomas Gür, Consultant

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Dinner Music: **Dan Laurin**



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