

This was America

The months of February that celebrate Valentine's Day have been murderous for three years. After a Russian aggression against Ukraine in 2022, an American attack on Europe in 2025.

What European was not attracted by the "American dream"? During the most difficult periods of our European history, when our countries were going through major social and economic crises, millions of Europeans found refuge in the United States to build a new life. Italians, Irish, Poles or Hungarians... at the end of the 19th century and the beginning of the 20th century arrived in New York. Ellis Island symbolized that scary passage where new immigrants had to pass a medical exam so as not to become a "public burden" for their host country. Under the watchful eye of the Statue of Liberty Enlightening the World, a gift from France to America that recalls our country's privileged relationship since Lafayette who participated valiantly in the independence of the New World against the British «colonizer». The American flag recalls this epic - the red and white stripes (first colonies become states) and the stars for each state that has gradually joined the most symbolic and most publicized democracy in the world.

During the two World Wars, the United States intervened twice at decisive moments. They enabled the victory of the Allies. During the First World War, they accelerated the collapse of authoritarian empires (Prussia, Austria- Hungary, Ottoman Empire, Russian Empire...). During the Second World War, the courage and idealism of thousands of American soldiers (who came to die on the beaches of the D-Day landings in Normandy and elsewhere in Europe) gave a coup de grace to Fascism and Nazism, which projected the end of Europe's enlightenment and democracy. Thousands of refugees from central Europe, because they were Jews, escaped the worst by leaving for America. There have been darker episodes where refugee boats were turned back. But history has held back the commitment and struggle of America and so many Americans for freedom.

Hollywood has vividly recalled these glorious episodes, the best weapon of soft power to defend American values of freedom and democracy. An Italian immigrant, Frank Capra, embodied this American idealism in "Life is Beautiful" (1). Steven Spielberg took over the torch with panache by celebrating the heroism of Americans in « Saving Private Ryan » or the courage of some Europeans in "Schindler's list" (2). More recently, Mike Nichols (whose family came from Germany and Russia), recalled in "Charlie Wilson's War" how the engagement of a Texas MP, Charles Wilson, helped arm Afghanistan to deal with the Soviet invasion after visiting an Afghan refugee camp in Pakistan. The transatlantic relationship has rocked the childhood and adolescence of millions of Europeans. Hollywood told us, with its happy endings, inspiring stories of Americans or Europeans, whose destinies were entangled. We were part of the same world, that of universalism, justice for all and equal opportunities.

During the Cold War, a Democratic president, John Fitzgerald Kennedy came to Berlin in 1961 to denounce the wall built by the USSR to prevent East Germans from fleeing to the West and regain their freedoms, public and private. "*Ich bin ein Berliner*" (4) he proclaimed, a spokesperson for the free and democratic world. What would he have thought of the speech by Vice President J.D Vance at the Conference on European Security in Munich on Friday, February 14, 2025 (5)? Curious Valentine's Day for Europe. Shame on him,

when the same Vance had in the past denounced a Republican president, Donald Trump, to the authoritarian, anti-immigration and protectionist speech. He was a zealous support of his new mentor in Munich. He declared that Europe and its European allies had become adversaries, imposing a trade war (tariffs) and declaring an ideological war (attacking our values).

The instrumentalization of immigration is the preferred weapon of authoritarian and anti-democratic speeches. JD Vance used the right numbers between 2021 and 2022 of immigration in the European Union which has reached a historical record. He forgot to mention that in 2022, because of the war being waged by Russia against Ukraine, EU countries welcomed more than 1.8 million Ukrainian nationals compared to 100,000 in the previous year. According to JD Vance, the Russian president Vladimir Putin is no longer the aggressor, the Ukrainian president, Volodymyr Zelensky is. He forgets that Ukraine has been suffering from a total war since 2022 by Russia. JD Vance has finally interfered in German domestic affairs by supporting a far-right party (6), which advocates «remigration» and holds an openly xenophobic speech. Finally, JD Vance has «recovered» with bad faith characteristic of the European and American extremist parties, the act of madness of a young Afghan refugee who ran into the crowd with a car, or the act of insanity by a Syrian refugee who attacked a teenager with a knife. Mental health issues are better known in Europe since COVID. Why would young refugees whose social and economic status is precarious, who are often the prey of mafia groups, and feel perpetually rejected by European populations increasingly sensitive to hate speech against foreigners escape from mental health?

The nightmare continued on Friday, February 28, 2025 when Republican president Trump and his vice president Vance attacked President Zelenski in Mondiovision, repeating Russia's speech and trying to humiliate the Ukrainian president who has been fighting for three years to defend his country, and Europe.

When a dream turns into a nightmare, you rub your eyes and pinch yourself to make sure you're awake. We are in a zone of intense turbulence. Our U.S. partners are carrying out a shock therapy on Europe. It takes strong shoulders and a strong heart to cross. Europeans and their allies will need all the goodwill. We can't do without partners, but we must protect ourselves from our opponents. Storytelling has changed. The glory days of Hollywood have passed. It is no longer a "fairy-telling".

Let us dream with Pastor Martin Luther King at the time of the civil rights struggle – that the America of heroes and fight for freedom will wake up. We will then be able to return with it, alongside the millions of refugees thrown out of their country by violent and disloyal geopolitics. Long live and forward Europe!

Bénédicte Halba runs a research institute (iriv) that has been working on the theme of migration since 2003, she hosted a club at the Cité des Métiers for a migrant audience (2012-2022) and published a blog since 2024- <https://actions-migration.blogspot.com/>.

(1) Franck Capra « Life is beautiful », USA, 1946

(2) Steven Spielberg « Saving Private Ryan » USA, 1998, « Schindler's list », USA, 1993

(3) Mike Nichols « Charles Wilson's war », USA, 2007

(4) I am a Berliner

(5) William Audureau, Philippe Bernard, Maxime Ferrer, Assma Maad et Manon Romain "Derrière les mots de J.D Vance à Munich », Le Monde, 23 & 24 février 2025

(6) AfD which obtained more than 20% of the votes in the German parliamentary elections of 23 February 2025