



**Observations on America After Five Days in Paris
August 9, 2022**

I recently had the good fortune of spending five days in Paris, France, with my middle child before she heads to college. Over the course of those five days, I made several observations I thought worth sharing as we trekked over 65 miles.

First, during breakfast in the hotel lobby one morning, a family of four from Colorado were talking about how one of the hotel bartenders wanted to visit Georgia and Texas, as that was where she deemed a lot was happening stateside. With thriving cities like Atlanta, Austin, Dallas, and Houston, as well as the vibe Elon Musk brought with him when he rooted SpaceX and Tesla in Texas and the Civil Rights history in Atlanta, it makes sense someone might want to visit those states. The dad shared with his family how he tried to dissuade her from visiting those states. His young daughter—and by young I mean roughly 8-years-old—commented that “Texas is dangerous,” which the dad concurred with.

The comment shocked me, as I couldn’t comprehend how such a young kid had such a firm opinion on the overall safety in a state she didn’t live in. Based on additional comments from the parents, it was clear they were progressive-leaning Coloradans who viewed Texas through that particular lens. Thus, red state equals “dangerous.” Never mind that Colorado suffers from massive homelessness, rampant drug use, and its own share of violence. The parents had clearly shared their adult-level thoughts with a young kid who would then grow-up believing whatever fake news they pedaled to her and her brother. The fact that he had propagated his biased views on Georgia and Texas to the hotel bartender did nothing other than extend America’s hyperpolarization to Europe.

Next, on this and other trips to Europe, I’ve noticed a trend: Europeans apparently love the New York Yankees. Everywhere you go and hear European accents, odds are high you will see a Yankees baseball hat. My daughter noticed the trend, too. After multiple conversations, it is clear the trend is due less to actual love of the Yankees and more to the unfortunate reality that too many Europeans limit their time in America to stops in New York City and Washington, D.C.

I say unfortunate because America’s best places aren’t limited to one city. I get why Europeans want to visit the “Big Apple” because it is one of the world’s biggest and most interesting cities. I just wish more of them went beyond New York City so they could truly “see” America. Not only would they save money (New York City isn’t cheap), but they’d experience the America they never hear about given how much of their knowledge about America comes from the New York Times or CNN.

Imagine what they'd think of America after spending time in the Mountain West with jaw-dropping vistas, wild animal encounters, and actual cowboys who still drive cattle. Or, the American South with country music in Nashville, beignets and jazz in the French District in New Orleans, and southern hospitality and cooking in Savannah. America has so much more to offer than what one gets spending time in crime-ridden, dirty New York City.

Then, there was no visible impact from the Russian war raging in Ukraine. Tourists were everywhere, including many with Russian or Ukrainian sounding accents. Though we saw a handful of Ukrainian flags outside windows, mostly we saw nothing that would signify there was a war going on just three countries to the east in which the United States was contributing hundreds of billions of dollars and tens of thousands of soldiers were being killed, injured, or captured. Because France, unlike Germany, relies so heavily on self-generated nuclear power and not on Russian oil and gas for its energy needs, we experienced no energy disruptions. Paris was lit up and buzzing with activity.

On our flight home, a dad with his two kids sat in front of us in the back of the airplane. We chatted briefly about my daughter heading to college in a few weeks and his daughter looking at colleges to apply to in a few months. He rambled off the list of schools: Stanford, Harvard, Yale, and other highly elite and expensive schools. Having just gone through the college application process with my two oldest kids, I was steeped in the ins and outs of getting into college.

Despite both of my kids having stellar transcripts (valedictorians, tons of AP classes with 5s on most tests, etc.), leadership resumes, awards, and strong SAT/ACT scores, neither stood much of chance of getting into the elite schools he listed. In fact, one got denied at Stanford and Brown without even getting wait listed. Yet, his daughter stood an excellent chance of getting into any of the schools she listed.

Why? One simple reason: skin-color. Due to affirmative action, his African-American daughter gets a boost my white daughters didn't get. So here were two young, privileged, and high-achieving women both returning to America from spending time in Europe with similar academic credentials, but our higher education establishment believes that one of them deserves an advantage over the other one based entirely on the level of pigmentation in their respective skin. Such a policy does a disservice to both women and judges each about as superficially as possible. Hopefully, the U.S. Supreme Court will strike down affirmative action in the next year so that all Americans will be viewed as who they are, not what they look like.

Finally, walking down the Champs Elysees, we came across the office for Iran Air among high-end stores for Hermes, Yves Saint Laurent, Dior, Chanel, and other expensive brands. It served as a vivid example of why France has so often thwarted America in its attempts to rein in the Iranian government and why France works so hard to mollify the Iranian despots. Based on the Iran Air website, there are, in fact, eleven Iran Air offices in Europe, with three in Germany (Cologne, Hamburg, and Frankfurt) and two in Italy (Milan and Rome). Imagine the business and

tourist dollars represented by those eleven offices and it isn't hard to understand why Europe consistently does everything to mollify Iran at the expense of America's national security.

Hyperpolarization. Limited exposure to America. An irrelevant war in Ukraine. Discrimination based on race. The purchasing power of Iranian oil. Who would have thought a short vacation in Paris would yield so much grist for the mill?